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The Vedic Deities

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Shantilal Nagar



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कृपया पुस्तक के ऊपर कोई निशान आदि
न लगायें।

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पुस्तक-विवरण की तिथि नीचे अंकित है। इस तिथि सहित
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Preface

The Indian religious traditions consider the Vedas to be of divine origin and *Apauruṣeya* or those which were not composed by any human effort. These Vedas deal with various subjects besides discussing the several gods and goddesses and other religious beliefs. Indeed it is not only the earliest body of the religious beliefs, preserved in the literary form, but it also represents a more primitive phase of thought than is recorded in any other literature. It can, moreover, be traced step-by-step through the various stages of development. It is, finally the source of the modern Hinduism which can thus be historically followed upto its origin, throughout a period of well over thousands of years. As a natural result of its value to the investigator of the religious thought in general, the study of Vedic religion gave birth in the later half of the nineteenth century, when these sacred books also attracted the attention of the foreign scholars.

The ideology of the Vedic literature hovers round the Vedic gods, the fire sacrifices, and the sacrificial animals. Indeed the concept of the Vedic gods is quite an original one and is based on the forces of nature primarily, though in the later texts several other factors like magic and other *tāntrik* practices entered the Vedic ideology. The *Atharvaveda* indeed happens to be the spokesman for such magical practices. During the initial Vedic literature the gods like Rudra, Viṣṇu, Prajāpati and Indra, the most powerful of the Vedic gods, were conceived in abstract form and not in human form, nor were their iconographical features prescribed. It was, therefore, left to the imagination of the worshippers to adore them in a suitable form.

The gods and the universe happened to be the creation of Supreme soul, irrespective of their being Indra, Agni, Mitra, Varuṇa, Aśvanikumāras, Soma, Sūrya or Pṛthivī. The all pervading Supreme Soul was considered to be eternal and everlasting. Indeed these gods were considered to be the forerunners of the later Brāhmaṇical cult wherein they were adopted in one form or the other.

Let us take the case of Viṣṇu who happened to be enjoying a somewhat insignificant position in the Vedic literature, but in the *Ṛgveda*, he was described to be an all pervading god. This quality was hardly available with any other early Vedic gods. In the Brāhmaṇic literature one could peep into his performances as Trivikrama form taking the three strides in order to measure the universe. This episode has been believed to be the earliest reference to the incarnations of Viṣṇu. But even at this stage he was never described to possess four arms or his attributes. The earliest attribute held by him possibly was the *gadā* or the club when he was known as Gadādhara. It may be recalled here that Viṣṇu was also found represented in a second century B.C. inscribed sculpture from Malhar (Madhya Pradesh) in which he is holding a *gadā* in both the hands. This goes on to testify that the earliest specimen of Viṣṇu appears in his Gadādhara form. Now with the passage of time, the Purāṇas developed stories about his other attributes like *śaṁkha*, *cakra* and lotus. The Purāṇas testify that Viṣṇu received the *śaṁkha* after the killing of the demon of the same name in the deep ocean. The *cakra*, however, is stated to be originally with Śiva and Viṣṇu had to meditate upon Śiva to receive it from him for the killing of a demon. Śiva obliged Viṣṇu, after putting the devotion of Viṣṇu to test. Śiva as

cakradānamūrti is therefore quite a popular motif in Indian plastic art, particularly in the medieval period. As far as the lotus is concerned, nothing definite about its being the attribute of Viṣṇu could be said, but the Purāṇas contain a story according to which the four-faced Brahmā emerged seated over a lotus, the stalk of which emerged from the navel of Viṣṇu.

Brahmā on the other hand, was mostly known in the early Vedic literature as Prajāpati, who was responsible for the creation of the universe. But his form of having four faces and four arms developed at a considerable later date, also earning him the title of Pitāmaha. It has not been possible to trace out the reason for the development of this type image as an old one or the grandfather. But possibly it was due to his being constantly associated with the creation.

Śiva was known as such in the *Ṛgveda* where he was popularly conceived as Rudra in an abstract form and the word Śiva appears only once in the *Ṛgveda*. All his iconographical features, making him five faced, four armed, marriage with Satī and the Pārvatī, with the bull as his vehicle developed at quite a late stage in the ancient Indian literature and art.

Vṛṣapakapi, happened to be a monkey god in the Vedic literature, who enjoyed the proximity of Indra, but was adopted in the subsequent times as Mahākapi or Hanumān as per the evidence of the *Brahma Purāṇa*.

Gaṇapati, no doubt appears in the Vedic texts, but he is not to be found as Gaṇeśa, the son of Śiva of the later Purāṇic period. He, no doubt, happens to be chief of the *gaṇas*, but the term Gaṇapati has also been used for Rudra or Śiva. Therefore, the Purāṇic Gaṇapati entirely is the developed form of Vedic Gaṇapati.

Similarly, Indra, the so powerful a Vedic god, in due course of time was relegated to the insignificant position of a Dikpāla in the art and literature of the later period. Similar is the position with the other Vedic deities. Indeed ever since the dawn of civilization on earth, several deities have appeared in human, composite or even animal forms, dominating the Indian religious thought in one or the other forms, while some of them disappeared from the Indian religious scene as rapidly as they had mushroomed, some of them disappeared with the passage of time, and still others came down to the modern times in an improved or modified form.

It may be recalled that the *Ṛgveda* was originally spread over together with the *Yajurveda*, *Sāmaveda* and *Atharvaveda* into over a thousand *Śakhās*. The study of the *Ṛgveda* started from Ṛṣi Paila. The hymns were composed in the form of metres forming the texts. On the basis of the *Mahābhāṣya* the number of the *Ṛgveda's Śakhās* has been counted as twenty-one. But currently only Śākala, Bāskala, Aśvālayana, Sāṃkhyāyana and Māṇḍukāyana only are available. In spite of the fact that except Śākala, the *Samhitās* of the other *Śakhās* are not available, but they are found mentioned at several places. Some of them find mention in the *Brāhmaṇas*, *Āraṇyakas* and others in the *Śrout Sūtras*. Therefore the existence of the five *Śakhās* is confirmed. As for example, on the basis of Śākala, the last *mantra* of the *Ṛgveda* happens to be समानी व आकृति। But on the basis of Bāskala, the text ends with this *ṛca* तच्छंयोरवृणीमहे।। This particular *ṛca* of the Bāskala *Śakhā* is the last hymn of Sanjñāna Sūkta of *Ṛgveda*. The *Samhitā* of the Bāskala

Śākhā ends with this Sūkta. There is a considerable difference between hymns of Śākala *Śākhā* as compared to those of the Bāskala *Śākhā*.

Presently only the *Śraut Sūtras* and *Gṛhya Sūtras* alone of the Aśvālayana Śākha are available. Similarly only the *Brāhmaṇas* and the *Āraṇyakas* of the *Sāmkyāyana Samhitā* are available; but the complete *Samhitā* is not available. There is a difference in the continuity of the hymns, available in the Śākala Śākhā and the *Sāmkyāyana Śākhā*. As for example, in the Śākala Śākhā, the appendices of *Rgveda* and Bālakhilya Sūkta have been separated from the *Samhitā*, whereas in the *Sāmkyāyana Śākhā*, they form part of the *Samhitā*. The text of the *Sāmkyāyana Śākhā* too is not available at present. Out of these five Śākhās only Śākala and Bāskala are more popular. The text that is divided into Maṇḍala and Sūkta is called Śākala and where the text is spread over in *Aṣṭaka-vargas*, comes under Bāskala; this has been opined by scholars. The difference between the Śākala and Bāskala Śākhās, in the Maṇḍalas, arrangement of Sūktas, chapters and *Vargas* have also been indicated in the ancient texts. As for example in the preface of the Kātyāyana Sūtra, composed by Vidyādhara Gauḍa, there is the mention of the following divisions of the *Rgveda*—

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| (i) Chapters—64 | (v) Sūkta—1000 |
| (ii) Aṣṭakas—8 | (vi) Anuvak—85 |
| (iii) Maṇḍalas—10 | (vii) Hymns—10,440. |
| (iv) Vargas—2006 | |

The number of Sūktas in each one of the ten Maṇḍalas is noted hereunder—

Maṇḍala	Nos. of Sūktas	Maṇḍala	Nos. of Sūktas
1st	191	2nd	43
3rd	62	4th	58
5th	87	6th	75
7th	104	8th	103
9th	114	10th	191
		(1st to 10th) Total	1,028

The total number of the *Rgvedic* hymns has been described to be ten thousand five hundred and eighty (10,580) in the *Camavyuha* by the Kātyāyana.

The Western scholars consider the first and the tenth Maṇḍalas of the *Rgveda* to be later additions, for a varitey of reasons including the style of the composition of the hymns and several other variations. Surprisingly enough, the group of foreign scholars have also doubted the authenticity of the first and the seventh *kāṇḍa* of the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, which claim has quite forcefully been contested by the author in his work entitled *Rāmakathā* which has recently been published. Unless, however, some cogent reasons for the addition of the first and the tenth Maṇḍalas of the *Rgveda*, highlighting the need for doing so are forthcoming the views of the

Western scholars would be difficult to be accepted. It may, however, be added that before the Vedas were produced in the written form, they were indeed carried over by recitation from the teacher to the pupil and as such in order to admit the theory of later addition of the 1st and the 10th Maṇḍalas is accepted one shall have to make a thorough search about the stage at which these additions were made. Were they made at the stage before their having been produced in writing or after the same. But no such tangible evidence could be forthcoming. While dealing with the brief introduction of the *Yajurveda*, it may be stated that Yask has traced the origin of the name of this Veda from यजुः (*Nirukta*, 7.20), which stands that the *Yajurveda* establishes the exact form of the *Yajña* यज्ञस्य मात्रां वि मीमात उ त्वः। (*Rgveda*, X.71.11). Thus the name of *Yajurveda*, has also been described as the *Adhvarya-Veda* as well. On the basis of the two different sects, the *Yajurveda* has been divided into two parts viz., *Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda* and *Śukla Yajurveda*.

There is a Paurāṇic story relating to the *Śukla* and *Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda*, according to which Pārāśara Vedavyāsa had divided the Vedic hymns into four parts, viz., *Rgveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Sāmaveda* and *Atharvaveda*. The four Vedas were respectively distributed among his four disciples named Paila, Vaiśampāyana, Jaiminī and Sumanta. Thereafter Vaiśampāyana taught the *Yajurveda* to his pupils named Yājñavalkya and others. At some stage the seer Vaiśampāyana asked in anger Vaiśampāyana to vomit out the knowledge of the Veda, he had been taught by the seer. When the knowledge was being so vomited out, the same was swallowed by the other pupils turning themselves in the form of birds (तित्तिरि). Thereafter the *Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda* came to be known by the name of *Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda*. On the other hand, the seer Yājñavalkya adored the Sun-god in grief performing hard *tapas*. The Sun-god was in turn pleased with the seer and appeared before him in the form of a horse, imparted the knowledge of the Veda to Yājñavalkya at noon. Thus the knowledge of the *Yajurveda* which was imparted by the Sun-god to Yājñavalkya came to be known as *Śukla Yajurveda*. Since the knowledge of the Veda was received by the seer at noon, the same was also called Mādhyandinā and since it was imparted by the Sun-god in the form of a horse, it was also given the name of Vājasneya. Though there is no difference between the opinion already expressed about the *Śukla Yajurveda* still there is some difference of opinion about the *Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda* because the vomiting of the invisible knowledge could be possible by means of yogic practices only and possibly it was so done.

According to Pātañjali, the great commentator, there were 101 *Śākhās* of *Yajurveda*. Out of these only eighty-six of the *Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda* and fifteen of the *Śukla Yajurveda* are available. The *Śākhās* of both these texts are listed hereunder—

(i) Śukla Yajurveda

काण्वाः माध्यन्दिनाः, शापेयाः, तापायनीयाः, कापालाः, पौण्ड्रवत्साः, पाराशर्याः, वैश्रेयाः,
वैनेयाः, गालवाः, कात्यायनीयाः, आवाटिकाः, परमावटिकाः, औधेयाः, वैजवाः॥

There are variations in the list available, in different texts.

(ii) Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda

Out of the eighty-six Śākhās of this text, only four are available which include—

तैत्तिरीय, मैत्रायणीय, कठ and कपिष्ठल।।

The *Mahābhāṣya*, on the other hand, spells out a thousand Śākhās of the *Sāmaveda* and it mainly deals with *Sāma-gāna* or the singing of hymns. Out of the thousand Śākhās, only *Rāṇāyaṇīya*, *Kauthomīya* and *Jaiminīya* are available.

The *Atharvaveda* of course is also known by the name of *Atharvāṅgirdveda*, *Brahmaveda*, *Bhīṣagveda* and *Kṣātraveda*. There are nine Śākhās of the *Atharvaveda*, known as पैपलाद, तौद, मौद, शौनक, जाजल, जलद, बह्वद, देवदर्श and चारणवैद्य।। Of these only the *Saundra Śākhā* alone is available in complete form. The *Paippalāda Samhitā* also is not available in complete form. No *Samhitā* of the other Śākhās is traceable at present.

The importance of the Vedas and the vastness of the literature has been projected above, which make it abundantly clear that only a fraction of such a vast literature is currently available and much of it has been lost with the passage of time.

These Vedic texts deal with several subjects including the science, religious, social, magical, archery, and several others which could be useful for one and all. There has been a school of thought, which considered that the Vedic Āryans were unaware of the ocean or the oceanic wealth, which has been contested by others, because there is a specific mention of समुद्र and its oceanic wealth, besides the ships, the sea travels and the aquatic animals in the Vedas. Another important aspect of the Vedas has been the concept of medical science and the medicinal plants so frequently mentioned in the *Atharvaveda*, some of which are considered to be still relevant and useful.

Another important aspect of the Vedic literature has been that it highlights many aspects of the modern Hinduism and the way of life. The Vedic people adored their ancestors in various ways. The regular sacrifice to ancestors was offered to father, grandfather, and the great-grandfather and celebrated every month at new moon. It was called the *Śrāddha* or 'offering given with faith.' For the purpose of this rite a space was marked off in the south-east, the region which was sacred to the manes and which the performer faced during the whole ceremony. Then the sacrificial fire was fetched and the food for the dead, consisting mainly of rice but also of other offerings prepared. Three small pits, a span long and four fingers broad, and deep, having been dug and bestrewn with *durbha* grass, and odd number of Brāhmaṇas were seated, entertained and given gifts. Libations to Soma, associated with fathers and to Agni, conductor of the sacrifice to the dead were also offered. A fire brand having been placed beside the pits to drive away the demons who might have intruded among the fathers, the latter was summoned to the offering and invoked to bestow wealth on their descendants. Jars of water were then set down besides the pits; the sacrificer took one with his left hand and pouring water into the pits mentioned the name of ancestor to whom the offering was made. Grasping the sacrificial ladle also with his left hand, he placed one-third of the food in the form of a cake in each pit, invoking

the fathers to partake the offering. In conclusion, pieces of cloth were presented to the ancestors as clothing. The whole ceremony was interspersed with the verses addressed to the father. It may be recalled here that these rituals are not found in the *Rgvedic* text but are found included in the post-*Rgvedic* works. Nevertheless there can hardly be any doubt that in its essential features, it already existed in the earliest Vedic society, because its general characteristic is extremely primitive; there is no trace of the souls of the dead abiding in the heaven. The gifts offered to them are not sent up by the sacrificial fire, but are placed on the earth and the spirit waits in or on the earth to be fed and clothed.

But efforts have been made to concentrate mainly on the gods and goddesses of the Vedic literature and their subsequent evolution and is likely to attract the readers and scholars alike.

Shantilal Nagar

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32. Vāyu(?) standing, Indore-Guna, 8th century A.D. (Photo courtesy—A.I.I.S.).
33. Vāyu riding a horse, Belur, Chitaldurg, 10th century A.D. (Photo courtesy—A.I.I.S.).
34. Headless image of standing Vāyu, Allahabad Museum, 11th century A.D. (Photo courtesy—A.I.I.S.).
35. Vāyu standing, stone, Jhalrapatan, 10th century A.D. (Photo courtesy—A.I.I.S.).
36. Kubera seated, stone, Bharatpur, 10th century A.D. (Photo courtesy—A.I.I.S.).
37. Kubera seated, stone, Pratap Museum, Udaipur, 11th century A.D. (Photo courtesy—A.I.I.S.).
38. Kubera standing, stone, Devī temple, Pañcamahal, 11th century A.D. (Photo courtesy—A.I.I.S.).
39. Isan dancing, stone, Thanjavur Distt., 9th century A.D. (Photo courtesy—A.I.I.S.).
40. Isan standing, stone, Bhita, Allahabad Museum, 10th century A.D. (Photo courtesy—A.I.I.S.).
41. Isan stone, Manikpur, 11th century A.D. (Photo courtesy—A.I.I.S.).
42. Isan standing, stone, Devī temple, Pañcamahal, 10th century A.D. (Photo courtesy—A.I.I.S.).
43. Five-headed and ten-armed Gāyatri, Miniature from Mysore, 18th century A.D. (Photo courtesy—A.I.I.S.).

1

Introduction

1. Date of the Vedas

The knowledge of Indo-Aryans is based on the evidence of the Vedic literature, of which the chief constituents are the four collections known as the *R̥gveda*, *Sāmaveda*, *Yajurveda* and *Atharvaveda*, but none of them has been properly dated. On linguistic grounds, the language of the *R̥gveda*, the oldest Veda may be said to be the oldest of all and scholars have given it the date of 1000 BC, but its constituents may be—and certainly are in the oldest parts—of much more ancient date and the latest parts, resembling the *Atharvaveda*, consisting of charms etc. are surely of much later date. The *R̥gveda* is neither historical nor a heroic poem but mainly a collection of hymns by a number of priestly families recited or chanted by them with appropriate solemnity at sacrifices to gods. Naturally, it is poor in historical data. The *Sāmaveda* hardly counts at all as an independent text. The *Yajurveda*, on the other hand (if the Brāhmaṇas pertain to the Black *Yajurveda*, are left out of account), are nothing but the collections of short magic spells used by certain class of priests at the sacrifices. For the history of the Indian people of the Vedic age, the *Atharvaveda* is certainly most important of the four Vedas, describing, as it does, the popular beliefs and superstitions of the humble folks.

2. The Vedic Religion

Before embarking on the topic of the Vedic gods, it would be proper to have a bird's eye view of the Vedas and the Vedic religion, the geographical distribution and the mode of life of the Vedic people. Broadly speaking the Vedic religion comprises of, besides the Vedic deities, of mythology and the magic. Religion means on the one hand, the body of the beliefs entertained by men regarding the divine or the supernatural power, and on the other hand, that sense of dependence on those powers which is expressed by word in the form of prayer and praise, or by both in the form of rituals and sacrifices. Mythology means the body of myths or stories which give an account of gods and heroes describing their origin and surroundings, their deeds and activities. Mythology is thus included in, though not co-extensive with, that aspect of religion which is concerned with belief. Magic on the other hand means, that body of practices which instead of seeking to gain the goodwill of the divine benevolent powers by acts of worship is largely directed against the hostile agencies.

The religion of the four Vedas regarded as a whole is connected with the worship of the gods largely representing the personification of the powers of nature, the propitiation of the demonic beings comes only to a limited extent within its sphere. The oldest and the most important of the four Vedas is the *R̥gveda*, from which considerable portions of the others are honoured, is a collection of hymns containing a large mythological element. These hymns are mostly the innovations of gods meant to accompany the oblation of Soma juice and the fire

sacrifices of melted butter. The hymns of the *Atharvaveda*, on the other hand, consist largely of spells meant for the magical application, while their religion is pronounced pantheism.

The Vedic beliefs on the other hand are mythological in nature and start from statements of the *Rgveda* to which the subsequent developments of the Vedic period are of sufficient importance in each case.

3. Cosmogonic Beliefs

Judged by their fragmentary references, to the origin of the world, the poets of the *Rgveda* usually regarded it as having been mechanically produced like a building, the material being wood and heaven and earth being supported by earth. The agents in the construction are regularly either the gods in general or various individual gods. The last book of the *Rgveda*, however, contains a few hymns which represent others views. One of these (X-90), though among the latest of the period preserves a very primitive belief. It announces the origin of the world from the body of a primeval giant whom the gods sacrificed. His head became the sky, the navel the air, and his feet became the earth. From his various members, four castes were produced. This being called *Puruṣa*, or man, and interpreted pantheistically in the hymn itself as, "all this, both what has become and what shall be", reappears as the world—soul in the *Atharvaveda* and the *Upaniṣads*.

There are again two cosmogonic hymns of the *Rgveda*, which explain the origin of the universe, philosophically rather than mythologically as a kind of evolution of the existent (*sat*) from the non-existent (*asat*). In another hymn of the same type as a creator (*dhīta*) is, after the evolution of the ocean through heat (*tapas*) introduced to produce in succession, sun and moon, heaven and earth besides air and ether. There is also a hymn (X.121) in which the heaven and the earth and the great woman are described as the creation of *Hiraṇyagarbhā*, the golden egg who is said to have arisen in the beginning to be the one god above all gods and is finally involved as Prajāpati, lord of all the created beings. It is to be noted here that in the cosmogonic hymns, the water is commonly thought as coming into the existence first. In the *Atharvaveda* the all-god appears as a creator under several new names.

The cosmogony of the Brāhmaṇas requires the agency of the creator, Prajāpati, who is not always the starting point. Sometimes the waters come first and on them float the golden germ (*Hiraṇya-garbhā*), from which arises the spirit which produces the universe. The contradiction is due to the theories of the evolution and of creation being combined. One cosmogonic myth of the Brāhmaṇas describes how the submerged earth was raised by a boar. The latter is post-Vedic mythology, developed into an incarnation of Viṣṇu.

The heaven and earth are ordinarily regarded in the *Rgveda* as the parents of the gods in general. It is only very rarely that other gods are spoken of as the parents of the rest; the dawn is once said to be the mother of the gods and both Brāhmaṇaspati and Soma are mentioned as their father. The cosmogonic hymns connect the origin of the gods chiefly with the element of water, but one of them describes the gods as having been born after the creation of the universe.

The Vedic beliefs regard the origin of man or the human race were somewhat fluctuating; the ultimate source of man was always thought to be divine. Agni, the god of fire, is at least once said to have begotten the race of man, and certain families of seers are regarded as independently descended through founders from the gods. Usually, however, the human race is traced to a first man, either Manu, or Yama, both of whom are the sons of Vivasvat or a Solar deity.

4. Nature of the Vedic Gods

The Vedic society believed in a number of gods or the supernatural beings varying in character and power. They comprise of two main groups—on the one hand, gods who are almost exclusively benevolent and receive worship, while on the other hand are the demons who are quite hostile in nature and whose operations have to be counteracted with the help of the gods or ritual expedients. The divine power again may be classed as higher gods, whose power pervades the world and controls the great phenomena of nature; and as lesser divinities whose activities are restricted to a limited sphere or are conducted on a similar scale; for instance tutelary deities and else. The divine nature is further shared by men of days gone by, ancient heroes, who are associated with the deeds of the gods and ancestors, who live with the gods and receive worship like them. Finally at the bottom of the scale are many inanimate objects and implements which are deified being invoked and worshipped like the divine beings.

(a) *The Higher Gods*

The gods are usually listed in the *R̥gveda* and *Atharvaveda*, as well as the *Brāhmaṇas* to be thirty-three in number, but there are occasional deviations or inconsistencies as regard to their belief or their number. Troops of deities, such as the sun gods are, of course, not regarded as included in that number. The thirty-three are in the *R̥gveda*, which are divided into three groups of eleven distributed in earth, air and the heaven, the three divisions of the universe. These three groups now containing eight, eleven and twelve deities respectively appear in the *Brāhmaṇas* under the names Vasus, Rudras and Ādityas.

The gods as have already been shown were believed to have had a beginning, but they were not thought to have all come into being at the same time; for the *R̥gveda* refers occasionally to other gods and the *Atharvaveda* speaks of the gods as having existed before the rest. Certain deities, moreover, are described as the offsprings of others. The *Atharvaveda* and the *Brāhmaṇas* also expressly state that the gods were originally mortals, adding that they overcame death with the practice of austerity. The same aspect is highlighted in the *R̥gveda* too, where the gods are said to have acquired immortality after drinking Soma.

(b) *Their Attributes*

The most important characteristic of the Vedic gods is the power; for they are constantly described as great and mighty. They regulate the order of the nature and vanquish the great power of evil. They hold sway over all the creatures. No one can thwart their ordinances or live beyond the time they appoint; and fulfilment of the wishes is dependent on them. Their omniscience,

which is restricted within narrow limits, is seldom referred to. It is an attribute which is emphasised in the case of Varuṇa only. The Vedic gods are benevolent beings who bestow prosperity on mankind, the only one in whom injurious traits appear being Rudra. They are, however, mortal according to the standard of an early stage of civilization. They are described as true and deceitful, being friends and protectors of the honest and righteous but punishing the sin and guilt. They are not above employing craft against the hostile and occasionally practice deceit even without the justification of a good end.

Since in most cases, the Vedic gods have not yet become dissociated from the physical phenomena which they represent, their figures are indefinite in outline and deficient in individuality. Having many features, such as power, brilliance, benevolence and wisdom in common with others, each god exhibited very few distinctive attributes. This vagueness is further increased with the practice of invoking deities in pairs, a practice making both gods share characteristics properly belonging to one alone. When nearly every power can thus be attributed to every god, the identification of one deity with another becomes easy. There are, in fact, several such identifications in the *Ṛgveda*. The idea is even found in more than one late passage that various deities are but a different form of a single divine being. This idea, however, never developed into monotheism for none of the sacrifices in the Vedic period were offered to a single god. Finally, in other later hymns in the *Ṛgveda* the deities like Āditi and Prajāpati are identified not only with all the gods, but with nature as well. This brings us to the beginning of that pantheism which became characteristic of later Indian thoughts. The practice of invoking god as the highest, frequent even in the other parts in the *Ṛgveda*, gave rise to the Max-Müller's theory of 'Leno-theism' or 'Kathenotheism' of that Veda which he defines as belief in individual gods alternately regarded to be the highest, the god addressed being for the moment treated as an independent and supreme deity alone, present to the mind. Criticism has, however, shown that one has to do only with the exaggerated form of praise which does not amount to a distinct type of religious thought. The Vedic gods in fact can conveniently be classified as to the three-fold division suggested by the *Ṛgveda*, viz., Celestial gods, Atmospheric gods and the Terrestrial gods.

The celestial gods, historically are the oldest among the Vedic gods of the sky, and go back to the Indo-European period according to some scholars. At times they are identified with the Greek Zeus, Dyaus and Heaven. The personification here hardly goes beyond the notion of paternity (Dyana-pitar=Zai-xdrep, Jup-piter). Dyaus is generally coupled with Pṛthvī, Earth, when the two are celebrated as the universal parents. He is once described as armed with a bolt and in another passage, as smiling through the clouds in allusion to the lightening sky.

Another much more prominent deity of the sky is Varuṇa, the greatest of the Vedic gods besides Indra. He too dates from an early period, for in the name he is possibly identical with the Greek *odparda* and in character is allied to the *Avestic Ahura Mazda*. Varuṇa is the chief upholder of physical and moral order (*ṛts*). By ordinance heaven and earth are held apart. He regulates the course of the sun, moon and stars. He causes the rivers to flow and the clouds to fertilize the earth with rain. Omniscient, he witnesses men's truth and falsehood. He gets angry

with the sinners who he severely punishes, binding them with the fetters. But he is gracious to the penitent, releasing men not only from their own sins but also those committed by their ancestors. The prayer for the forgiveness of the guilt is characteristic of the Varuṇa hymn, which in general are exalted and ethical in the vedas. With the development of Prajāpati as the creator and the Supreme god in the later Vedas, the importance of Varuṇa waned, till in the post-Vedic period he remained only the dominion of waters as the god of the ocean.

Five gods represent the various aspects of the solar activity. Oldest of these is Mitra, the friend, probably the personification of the sun's beneficent power is an inheritance from the Indo-Iranian period being identical with Persian sun-god Mithra whose cult became so widely diffused in the Roman empire during the second and fourth century AD. In the *R̥gveda* he has almost entirely lost the individuality and is hardly ever invoked except in association with Varuṇa.

Sūrya, etymologically allied to the Greek 'Hēlios', is the most concrete of the solar deities, this being the regular name of the luminary. He is the husband of Dawn. His car, often referred to is generally driven by the seven steeds. He is the soul of all that moves or is fixed. All creatures depend on him. He prolongs life and drives away the disease. His eye and his all seeing power, are often spoken of; and he is besought to declare men sinless to Mitra and Varuṇa.

Savitṛ, the stimulator, represents the quickening activity of the sun. Bestowing immortality on gods as well as the length of life on man, he also conducts the spirit of the dead to where the righteous dwell. To him is addressed the most famous stanza of the *R̥gveda* (III.62.10), with which, he was in ancient times invoked as at the beginning of the Vedic study and which is still repeated by every orthodox Hindu in the morning prayers. It is called Sāvitrī from the deity or the Gāyatrī from the metre—

*"May we attain that excellent
Glory of Savitr the god
That he may stimulate our thoughts."*

Puṣan, the prosperer, personifies possibly the beautiful power of the sun and appears as the pastoral deity, who protects cattle and guides them with his goad. He is the guardian of the paths and knows the ways of heaven. He also conducts the dead to the abode of the fathers. Though he occupies quite a subordinate position in the *R̥gveda* and is comparatively invoked with lesser frequency than the other gods, Viṣṇu is historically the most important of the solar deities, because he developed into a mighty god of the modern Hinduism in the course of time. His three strides typifying doubtless, the course of the sun, constitutes the central feature in his mythology. His highest step is the heaven, the abode of the gods. He is frequently said to have taken his three strides for the benefit of man. This general trait is illustrated by the Brāhmaṇa myth, in which Viṣṇu assumes the form of a dwarf as an artifice to recover the earth in possession of the demons, by taking the firm strides. Viṣṇu's characteristic benevolence was in post-Vedic mythology further developed in the doctrine of the incarnation for the good of the humanity.

Uṣās is the goddess of dawn, the daughter of Dyaus is the only female deity involved with frequency in the *R̥gveda* and is the most graceful creation of the Vedic seers. Being a poetical

rather than the religious figure, she did not like the other gods receive a share in the Soma offering.

The Aśvins are considered to be the lords of steeds and are also treated as the twin gods of morning, sons Dyaus eternally young and handsome, who are addressed in many hymns. They are frequently known with the epithets of *Nāsatya* or true. Uṣās is born at the yoking of their car on which their spouse Sūryā, daughter of the sun, accompanied them. Delivering from distress in general and from the shipwreck, in particular, they also happen to be the divine physicians. They have several traits in common with two horse men of Greek mythology. The origin of these twin deities is obscure; it is perhaps most likely that they represent either the twilight or half dark and half light or the morning and evening.

(c) *Atmospheric Gods*

Indra is the prominent deity in the atmospheric sphere. While Varuṇa is the great moral ruler, Indra happens to be the mighty warrior. Indra is indeed the great nation god of the Vedic Indians. An indication of this is found from the fact that one-fourth of the Vedic hymns are dedicated to Indra. He is the mythological creation of an earlier period, for Indra is a demon in Avesta. Though he is more atmospheric than any other Vedic god, still his original character is tolerably clear. He is primarily the thunder god and his conquest of the demon Vṛtra is the central feature of the mythology which surrounds him. His chief and specific epithet is the *Vṛtahn* or the slayer of Vṛtra. Armed with his bolt (*vajra*), elated by copious draughts of *Soma* and aided by Maruts or storm gods, Indra engages in the fray. The fight is terrible; for heavens and earth tremble with fear as the conflict rages. The constant repetition of the combat corresponds to the perpetual renewal of the phenomena of the thunderstorms which underlie the myth. The result of the victory is the release of the water for man and recovery of the light of the Sun. Indra thus became the god of the battle whose aid is constantly invoked in conflicts with the earthly foes. He is often described as the protector of the Aryan colour and vanquisher of the black race. One of his commonest epithet is *sakra* which has been spelt as Sakka in Pali Buddhist texts, certain immoral traits also appear in Indra's character. He sometimes indulges in acts of capricious violence, such as slaying his father or shattering the car of Dawn. He is greatly addicted to *Soma*, which he drinks in enormous quantities, to stimulate him in his war-like exploits. One entire hymn of the *Rgveda* (X.119) consists of a monologue in which Indra is inebriated with *Soma*, boasts of his greatness and prowess. While Varuṇa, after the period of the *Rgveda*, gradually sank into obscurity, Indra in the Brāhmaṇas, became the chief of the heaven and he maintained his position in the *Purāṇas*, though of course, subordinate to the trinity viz., Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva.

Three of the lesser important deities of the air are connected with the lightning. Of these, Trita is somewhat an obscure god enjoying the epithet of *āptya* or watery, mentioned only in the detached versions of the *Rgveda*. He also seems to represent the third form of the fire and goes back to the Indo-Iranian period. Both his name and the epithet are found in Avesta. In the *Rgveda*, he is also known as the possessor of *Soma*, who aids Indra in slaying Vṛtra and three

headed demon Viśvarūpa or performs the latter exploit himself. He kindles the celestial fire and even himself appears as the fire.

Apannapāt also goes back to the Indo-Iranian period and is rarely mentioned in the *Rgveda*. He is described as clothed in lightning and shining without fuel in the waters. He represents the lightning form of fire as produced from the thunder-bolt.

Matrisvan is referred to in scattered verses of the *Rgveda* as a divine being who (like the Greek Prometheus) brought down the hidden fire from heaven to earth. He was originally in all likelihood as an aerial form of Agni, with whom, he is sometimes actually identified. His character then underwent a transformation, for in the later Vedas, the Brāhmaṇas and the post-Vedic literature, he appears as a wind-god.

It is somewhat remarkable that Rudra, the early form of the post-Vedic Śiva, who in the *Rgveda* occupies a very much subordinate position, like that of Viṣṇu, should have risen to the parallel pre-eminence with Viṣṇu in a later age. Rudra is usually described as armed with the bow and arrows, but sometimes he appears with a thunderbolt and lightning shaft. He is fierce and destructive looking like a wild beast, being the ruddy boar of the heaven. The most striking feature of the hymns addressed to him is the fear of his terrible shafts and the deprecation of his wrath. For he slays men, cattle and assails with disease. He, indeed, is the malignant deity of the Vedas. His malevolence, however, unlike that of a demon is not the only side of his character. For he is the healer as well as a destroyer, being even lauded as the greatest of the physicians. Thus he is often besought not only to preserve from calamity but also to bestow welfare on man and beasts. The epithet of Śiva, the auspicious, begins to be applied to him in the *Rgveda*, grows more frequent in the later Vedas and in the post-Vedic mythology, it finally became his regular name. With the increasing use of this epithet, the malevolence of Rudra became more pronounced in the later Vedas.

The white *Yajurveda* which adds various disgraceful attributes, furnishes the transition to the terrific and the repulsive. Śiva of Hindu mythology basis of Rudra is somewhat obscure, but the inference from the evidence of the *Rgveda* seems to be justified that he originally represented the destructive agency of thunder-storm. His uncanny and baleful traits have, however, also been explained as starting from the conception of a deity mountain and forest whence storm and disease attack man and beasts.

The sons of Rudra and Pṛṣṇi (the mottled cloud cow) are Maruts or storm-gods, also often called Rudras, a group of thrice seven or thrice sixty deities, the constant allies of Indra in his conflict. They are described like fires at their birth and as born from 'the laughter of lightning'. They are young warriors armed with spears and battle-axes wearing helmets and decked with golden ornaments. Their headlong course is often graphically depicted. They ride on golden cars which gleam with lightning; with their fillies, they rend the mountains and shatter the majestic trees of the forest. They share to some extent, some destructive as well as the beneficent traits of their father Rudra. Their lightning-bolts always slay men and kin. But they also bring the healing remedies, apparently the rains, which fertilise the earth.

(d) The Wind-god (Vāyu)

The god of wind is not a prominent deity in the *Ṛgveda*. Under the more anthropomorphic form of Vayu, he is chiefly associated with Indra. As *Vats*, he is described in the more concrete nature (often in connection with the verb *vā*, 'to blow' from which the word is derived, being coupled only with the less anthropomorphic god known as Parjanya. A personification of the rain cloud is Parjanya, son of Dyaus. He is not a prominent deity, being invoked only in three hymns of the *Ṛgveda*, which describe, however, the activity in the rain storm very vividly.

(e) Apah (Water)

Apah, the waters are praised as the divine powers in four hymns of the *Ṛgveda*. They are celestials abiding in the homes of the gods. The acrid waters are the mothers of the forms of Agni, *Apāmnapat*, son of waters. But, as flowing in channels and having the sea for their goals, the waters are also terrestrial. They are young wives, mothers and goddesses, who bestow boons and come to the rescue of the sacrificer. They not only bear away defilement, but cleanse from moral guilt, the sins of violence, cursing and lying. They also grant remedies, long life and immortality.

5. Terrestrial Deities

The rivers too are frequently personified and invoked in the *Ṛgveda*. Thus the Sindhu is celebrated as a goddess in one hymn and Vipas (Beas) and Satadru (Sutlaj) sister streams of the Punjab in another. The most important and oft spoken is, however, Sarasvatī. Though the personification goes much farther, here, than in the case of other streams, the connection of the goddess with the river is never lost sight of in the *Ṛgveda*. In the *Brāhmaṇas*, Sarasvatī is identified with the goddess of speech and in Hindu mythology she appears further modified as the goddess of eloquence and wisdom, invoked as a Muse and regarded as the wife of Brahmā.

The Earth-goddess is always associated with the Dyaus, is always spoken as the mother. The personification is rudimentary, the attributes of the god are chiefly those of the physical earth.

6. Dual Divinities

A peculiar feature of the Vedic religion is the invocation of the pair of deities whose names are combined as the dual compounds. About a dozen such pairs are celebrated in the Vedic hymns and about half a dozen more the detached verses of the *Ṛgveda*. By far the largest number of hymns is addressed to the couple Mitra-Varuṇa, though the name most frequently compounded in the dual are Heaven and Earth (*Dhyava-Pṛthivī*). Most likely the latter pair being associated as the universal parents from the Indo-European period onwards, furnished the analogy for this dual type. They are also called as the two worlds in the *Ṛgveda*.

7. Groups of Deities

Among the creations of the Vedic mythology, a few more or less definite groups of deities are also found who are generally associated with some particular god. The *Māruts* attend on

Indra, from the most numerous groups. Under the name of Rudras, they are also occasionally associated with their father Rudra. The smaller group of Ādityas of whom Varuṇa is the chief, are constantly mentioned in company with the mother Aditi. Their number in the *Ṛgveda* is mentioned to be seven or, with the addition of *Mātaṇḍa*, eight; while in the *Brāhmaṇas* and later it is regularly twelve. One passage of the *Ṛgveda* enumerates six of them—Mitra, Aryamān, Bhaga, Varuṇa, Dakṣa, Amśa; Sūrya was regarded as the seventh. A much less important group without individual names or definite number in the Vedas is that of Vasus whose leader is, in the *Ṛgveda*, generally Indra, but in the later Vedic texts, generally Agni. In the *Brāhmaṇas*, their number is generally stated to be eight. There are finally the Viśvadevas or all gods who are invoked in many hymns. It is an artificial sacrificial group intended to include the entire pantheon and to ensure the omission of no deity when all were meant to be invoked. But in spite of its name the comprehensive group was, strange to say, sometimes conceived as a narrower one associated with others like the Vasus and Ādityas.

8. Lesser Divinities

Besides the higher gods already detailed, a number of lesser divine powers are also known in the *Ṛgveda*. The most prominent of them are the Ṛbhus, a deft handed trio, who by their marvellous skill acquired the rank of deities. Among their five main feats of dexterity, the greatest consisted in transforming the bowl of Twstṛ into four shining cups. The bowl and the cups have been variously interpreted as the moon with its four phases or the year with its seasons. The Ṛbhus further exhibited their skill in renewing the youth of their parents by whom Heaven and Earth seem to have been meant. The myth of the Ṛbhus having rested for twelve days in the house of the sun is probably an allusion in the introduction of the twelve days at the winter solstice so as to bring the lunar year to 354 days into harmony with the solar year of 366 days.

Occasional mention is made in the *Ṛgveda* of the Apsarās (moving in the waters) who happen to be the celestial water nymph, the spouse of the corresponding genius Gandharvas, occasionally more than one Apsarās are spoken of. In the *Atharvaveda*, and later, Apsarās are mentioned as the class regularly associated with the Gandharvas and though they are still connected with the waters and clouds, their sphere is here, as well as in the *Yajurveda*, extended to the earth as well where they burnt the different varieties of fig-trees, called Nyāgrodha, Aśvattha, Udumbarā and Plākṣā, in which the music of their cymbals and lutes is heard. In the *Brāhmaṇas* they appear as nymphs of great beauty devoted to the song, dance, play and music. Several individual names of the Apsarās are mentioned in the Vedic literature.

9. Tutelary Deities

There are a few deities in the Vedic literature, which are of the tutelary order, guardians watching over the welfare of the house or the field. One of them is Vastuspati—lord of the dwelling, who is rarely mentioned in the *Ṛgveda*, where he is invoked to grant a favourable entry, to remove disease and to bestow protection and prosperity. The *Sūtras* prescribe that Vastuspati should be propitiated when a new house is built. Kṣetrapati—the lord of the field is besought

in the *Ṛgveda* to grant cattle and the houses and to confer prosperity. The *Sūtras* say that he is to be worshipped when a field is ploughed. *Sītā*, the furrow is once invoked in the *Ṛgveda* to dispense crops and rich blessings.

10. Abstract Deities

Two distinct types of abstract deities are found in the *Ṛgvedic* literature. The first category included *Dhatṛ* or *Prajāpati* or the Lord of creatures. This agent god was almost of a rare occurrence appearing for the most part in the latest book of the *Ṛgveda*. *Dhātṛ*, an epithet of *Indra* and *Viśvakarmā* appears also as an independent deity who creates heaven and earth, sun and moon. In the post-Vedic period *Dhatṛ* has become one of regular names of the creator and preserver of the world. *Dhatṛ* the supporter, *Tratṛ*, the protector and *Netṛ* the leader. The only agent god mentioned with any frequency in the *Ṛgveda* is *Tvaṣṭṛ*, the fashioner or the artificer, though no hymn is addressed to him. He is the most skilful of the workmen having among other things fashioned the bolt of *Indra* and a new drinking cup for the gods. He shapes the forms of beings and presides over the generations. He happens to the grandson of *Soma* which is called the mind of *Tvaṣṭṛ* and *Indra* drinks it in his house. He is the father of *Saranya*, wife of *Vivasvat* and mother of the primeval twins *Yama* and *Yāmī*. The origin of this deity is obscure. He may in the beginning represented the creation activity of the sun, having then because of his name, become the centre of attraction for the myths illustrative of the creative skill; he finally came to fill the place of the divine artificer in the Vedic pantheon.

There are a few other abstract beings whose names were the epithets of older gods. They are of rare and late occurrence in the *Ṛgveda*, their appellations being mostly component in form and representing the Supreme god who was being evolved at the end of the *Ṛgvedic* period. The historically most important among these is *Prajāpati*, the lord of creatures. Originally the epithets of such gods as *Savitṛ* and *Soma*, the name is mentioned in a late verse of the last book of the *Ṛgveda* as that of a distinct deity in the character of a creator. *Prajāpati*, in the *Atharvaveda*, is often white *Yajurveda* and regularly in the *Brāhmaṇas* is recognised as the leader and the father of the gods. In the *Sūtra* literature, he is identified as *Brahmā* his successor in the post-Vedic age.

The gods of the Vedas are anthropomorphic in nature. The parts of their bodies which are frequently mentioned, are in many cases, however, little more than figurative illustrations of the phenomena of nature represented by the deity. Thus the arms of the sun are nothing more than his rays and the tongue and the limbs of *Agni* merely denote his flames. Some of the gods appear equipped as warriors especially, *Indra*; others are described as priests especially *Agni* and *Bṛhaspati*. All of them drive through the air in luminous cars drawn chiefly by steeds but sometimes by other animals or birds too.

11. The Food

The favourite food of the men is also that of the gods consisting of milk, butter and *ghee* and the flesh of sheep, goats and cattle. It is offered to them in sacrifice. This is either conveyed

to them in heaven by the god of fire or they come in their cars to partake of it if litter of grass proposed for the reception. *Soma* happens to be their favourite beverage.

12. The Abode

The abode of the gods is described as the heaven or the highest step of Viṣṇu (the Zenith) where, cheered by the droughts of *Soma* they lead the life of bliss.

13. The Demons (Vṛtra)

Vṛtra has been classed as a demon in the *Ṛgveda*. Of the demons which are mentioned in the *Ṛgveda* are of two types. The higher and the more powerful class, the enemies of the gods are generally called the *asuras* in the *Atharvaveda* and the later Vedic texts. This word however rarely means demon in the *Ṛgveda* where it preserves the earlier meaning of being the 'mysterious people' and also denotes a god (in the Avesta). The earlier notion of the conflict between a single god and a single demon as exemplified by Indra and Vṛtra in the *Ṛgveda* gradually made way for that of the hostility of gods and demons as two opposing hosts. This is the regular view of the Brāhmaṇas. Here the *Asuras*, no less than the gods are reported as the offsprings of Prajāpati. Here, the *Asuras*, often vanquish the gods at the outset being finally worsted only by artifice.

Of course, in the conflicts between the gods and the *asuras*, the one between Indra and Vṛtra had been of considerable importance and has been variously discussed by the scholars. Indeed the problem of Vṛtra is the one, which has been drawing the attention of the scholars ever since the time of Yask, who was the earliest commentator on the *Ṛgveda* and whose work has survived. The Indra-Vṛtra conflict has been interpreted to mean the symbolic struggle between the forces of darkness and those of the light or symbolising the piercing of the cloud (Vṛtra) by Indra (the god of vegetation par excellence) and the consequent fall of the rains or reflecting the picture of the tremendous struggle of the Aryans against the non-Aryans of India or as the myth of the creation or as the ritual fight between the godly life-giving powers and the demons who stand for destruction and chaos.

Sāyana puts forth several interpretations with regard to the Indra-Vṛtra conflict. In some cases he interprets in terms of the phenomenon of thunderstorm characterised by the piercing of the rain clouds and the consequent fall of the rains. For example, Sāyana remarks "Vṛtra is a cloud, because he covers the sky." "He covers, envelops the sky, then he is Vṛtra the clouds." In some passages, Indra Sāyana describes Vṛtra as the 'Envelopor, the Asura.' Curiously enough, Sāyana also describes Vṛtra as an enemy and from his description it is clear that by the term *Śatru* in these passages, he means earthly enemy; thus Indra is requested to obliterate Vṛtra, who is described by the commentator as *Śatru*. "Kill or obliterate Vṛtra, the enemy". Besides the above, Sāyana has several other interpretations for Vṛtra.

Max-Muller too puts forward several interpretations in connection with the Indra-Vṛtra myth. Indra was the Jupiter Pluvius of the Vedas who fought against the powers of darkness of night and winter and especially of the robbers of the rain cloud. Once he styled Vṛtra or Vṛtras

as the evil spirit in the Veda. He identified Vṛtra or Ahi with Azhi Dahakas of the Avesta and Orthros, Ethis, Ophis, Echam of Greek mythology or with Drakun dragon or Python who was killed by Apollo, or with Āge or Oegir or Uvki, Eche, or Eckhart of the medieval Germanic epic poetry.

Besides the above, various scholars have interpreted the personality of the Vedic Vṛtra in various ways, which have been quite controversial. However, in an in-depth study of the problem A.K. Lahiri has expressed his opinion as follows—

“In brief we believe that the saga of Vṛtra in the early Vedic period reflects on the privations and difficulties of the Aryans in India. The two evils endangering the life of the Vedic Aryans at this time were firstly the extremely arid conditions of the north, north-western and the Punjab regions of India, when it was thought that the demonic power of resistance had obstructed the flow of the rain or river waters; secondly the incessant strife and conflict among the Aryan tribes themselves as also against the autochthones led to the demonisation of these types of enemies creating obstruction. Later cosmogonic details were attached to the Vṛtra Saga at a certain stage and thus, we believe, is the contribution of Babylonians in Indian civilization. Lastly came the ritualistic explanation of Vṛtra myth in the later Vedas. Vṛtra, the demonic negative force must be crushed by the positive force of the ritual, Indra, who, it was believed, by annihilation of the negative potentiality, would bring about regeneration in the ritual and the life of the world.”

—(*Vedic Vṛtra*, A.K. Lahiri, Delhi-1984)

14. The Vedic Mythology

The *Ṛgvedic* poets were deeply affected by the apparently mysterious working of the awe-inspiring forces of nature. Their hymns therefore reflect in places the primitive attitude of mind which looks upon all nature as living presence, or an aggregate of animated entities. The luminaries who follow a fixed course across the sky are the *devas* (the shining ones) or gods. Naturally the sense of dependence of human welfare on the powers of nature, the unexplained mysteries of whose working invests them with almost a supernatural or divine character, finds its expression in various forms of worship.

At the same time, the attempt of the human mind, more poetic than scientific, to account for the various forces and phenomena of nature with which man is confronted, leads to the rise of myths. When the imagination interprets a natural event as the action of a personified being resembling a human agent, a myth is born. The creative fancy of the *Ṛgvedic* poets goes on adding new touches to the picture, so that a natural phenomenon ultimately appears as a drama of human passions and not an unintelligible and chaotic happening. The stage of anthropomorphism is thus reached. Although the *Ṛgvedic* mythology is not as primitive as some scholars once believed it to be, in no other literary movement of the world do we come across the primitive phase of the evolution of the religious beliefs which reveals to us the very process of personification by which natural phenomena developed into gods. The myths that have

developed around a deity are in many cases transparent enough to keep the physical basis almost in full view all the time. The name of the god often hides but little. Nevertheless, in cases where such a clear view of the original nature of a god is not possible, the etymological equations of comparative mythology have not proved to be the reliable guides that they were once supposed to be.

The closely allied mythology of the Iranians is illuminating at times, but mythological affinities are not as numerous as one could be led to expect from the striking linguistic affinity of the oldest form of Avesta with the *Rgvedic* dialect in vocabulary, metre, syntax, diction and general poetic spirit, the reason being the considerable overhauling of mythological conceptions in Iran by religious reform of Zarathustra. The *Rgveda* is a moment of Indo-European mythology and in this respect, is equalled in importance only by Greek mythology. The *Rgvedic* mythology, therefore forms a connecting link between the later Indian phase of the religious beliefs and the Indo-Iranian as well as the earliest Indo-European phase.

Turning further to the lines of the mythological evolution within the *Rgveda*, it may be stated that in the hymns of the *Rgveda*, those invoking the Sun, the Dawn, Fire and others one has to come across face to face with the corresponding physical phenomena exercising directly their beneficent powers. The process of personification next makes gradual progress and the personified phenomena is deified and thus emerge the concrete figures of Uṣa, Sūrya and Agni, with whom the poet holds, as it were, direct communication. We are not so fortunate in the case of the greatest figures of the *Rgvedic* pantheon, namely Varuṇa and Indra regarding whose physical basis no certain conclusions have so far been arrived at. But in the case of the large number of Vedic gods, it is possible to trace the original forces or events in nature. Where the personification does not dominate the conception, the name of the deity is identical with the natural phenomenon; as in the case of Uṣās and Sūrya. When the names differ, the personification has evidently advanced to the stage of anthropomorphism, and apotheosis. The number of gods is now on the increase due to various reasons.

It is generally held that the religion of the *Atharvaveda* is apparently an amalgam of the Aryan and the non-Aryan ideals achieved after the advance of Aryans deeper into India. According to this view the Vedic Aryans as they advanced into India, came across uncivilised tribes worshipping snakes, serpents, stocks and stones but instead of destroying these barbarian neighbours or allowing themselves to be swamped by them, the Aryans absorbed them. This spirit of accommodation naturally elevated the religion of primitive tribes but degraded the Vedic religion by introducing into it sorcery and witchcraft. In the opinion of the writers, this view is not wholly correct. Magic and religious cults, having an identical aim, is the beginning, namely, the control of the transcendental world, which have parted company in the *Atharvaveda* exactly as they have done in the religion of the most peoples in the world, though there is no denying that such a process of separation was considerably helped by the Aryan contact with the natives of India, who had their own worship of spirits and stars, trees and mountains and other superstitions.

By the *Sāmaveda* and the *Yajurveda*, we enter a new world, as it were. The atmosphere is then pervaded with the smoke of sacrifice and the incense of the rituals. The sacrifice dominates everything. These two *Samhitās* have been compiled primarily with the idea of their use at the sacrifices. There are, indeed, nothing more than the text-books or song-book and prayer-book for the practical use of two of the four principal priests. No account of the religion of this period can be understood in its proper perspective unless one follows the broad line along which the institution of the sacrifice developed in this stage.

Now travelling through the period of the *Brāhmaṇas*, one comes across many creations—legends which are the strange admixture of metaphysical thought with disconnected explanations of sacrificial rules. The majority of them generally begin with the narration that Prajāpati practiced austerities through self-torture and mortification as a preparation for the task of the creation, but there are passages in the *Brāhmaṇas*, where Prajāpati is himself looked upon as created and where a starting point of creation is the primeval waters of *Brahman* or the Non-existent. Desire is the germ of the existence, the motive power of all creation.

The central and ethical teaching of the *Brāhmaṇas* is that the life is a duty and a responsibility. Man is born with certain *ṛṇas* or debts, which he must discharge during his life time. He owes a debt to the gods, to *Ṛsis*, to manes, to men and the lower creatures and he discharges his debts if he worships the gods, studies the Vedas, performs funeral ceremonies, is hospitable to guests and offers oblations to the *bhūtas*. Thus there is no lack of high moral sense and noble sentiments. Selflessness must characterise all our actions. The *Brāhmaṇas* have a remarkable sacrifice—the *Sarvamedha*—wherein everything is to be sacrificed, in order to attain the freedom of spirit. Prayer and the good work constitute godliness, which is the first requisite of the good-life. Truthfulness in utterance and action is the foundation of the moral life. There are hints in the *Brāhmaṇas* that excessive ritualism was bringing on a reaction. For example, knowledge rather than sacrificial gifts or asceticism is valued in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (X.5.4.16). The theory that confession implying repentance somewhat mitigates the guilt, is traceable in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*. Inner purity was insisted on as much as external purity. Truth, performance of *dharma* (duty), respect for parents, love of fellow beings and abstinence from theft, adultery and murder were the *sine qua non* of the good life.

The description of heaven in the *Ṛgveda* is only elaborated in the post-Vedic texts, besides the *Brāhmaṇas*. The essentials are the same. The *Atharvaveda* tells how the dead man is conducted upwards by Maruts with gentle breezes, fanning him until he recovers his complete body and meets the fathers who reside in the company of Yama. The idea that the dead are nourished by the piety of the relatives on earth is also found in the *Atharvaveda*. Such nourishment may either be buried with the dead so that the grains of the corn or sesame, so buried may turn into wish-cows in heaven or the nourishment may be conveyed through subsequent offerings. This indeed is the germ of the later *Śrāddha* idea. The *Ṛgvedic* idea of *nirṛiti* as a place of darkness in which the luminaries are lost has been developed by the *Atharvaveda* into *naraka* (the hell) which is the place of female goblins and a place of utter darkness. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* and the *Kausītiki Brāhmaṇa*, add their

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own touches to the horrid picture of the hell. The two paths, one of the Devas and the other of the *pitṛs* have naturally been mentioned, as they have been fore-shadowed in the *Ṛgveda*. The theory of metempsychosis does not appear to have been formulated clearly in the *Saṁhitās* and the *Brāhmaṇas*, though the doctrine, that the agony of the death is to be endured not once only but repeatedly as one may die repeated deaths in the next world, prepares us for a very important part that the theory plays in the Upaniṣads, where the conception of repeated deaths is merely transferred from the next world to the present one. The idea of the reward and punishment, after death, in exact correspondence in the good and bad deeds of a person in this life, has gained a firm hold in this period. The attainment of immortality and the company of the gods in the heaven—a highly ennobled form of the earthly life perpetuated in the surroundings of bliss is the deeply cherished aim of, and incentive to the practice of piety and good works in this life.

However, in the post-Vedic period, the human approach towards life and the position after the death went on further developing with the practice of invoking various gods for seeking their blessings and help for a variety of purposes, and in this process, not only a large number of rituals, rites, ceremonies and other religious practices were concerned but also several myths, in support of the prescribing of such practices.

Another aspect of the Vedic deities has been that they are not always considered to be imaginary deities always, and the scholars have tried to correlate them with the deities of the Harappan culture. As for example, H.S. Vats, while tracing the presence of Yama in the antiquarian remains of Harappa during the excavation of the site has observed as follows, while describing a scene painted over the pottery unearthed from the Harappa site—

“This elaborate painting, occurring as it does, on a buried pot is meant to portray, what was believed to happen to the dead person, there can be hardly any doubt. It appears to me that the hound in the left hand scene may, like the two hounds of Yama, be the hound of Hades and that the right hand scene, when the cattle are now decked with trident crests, depicts them in the ‘Abode of Bliss’ after they have passed through the intermediate Hades. The goat and the deified intermediary, an inference, which I have already observed, may be drawn both from the large size and the crests on each horn.

“In discussing early Indo-Aryan customs regarding the Dead and Disposal of the Dead, Professor Hillbrandt says, ‘The living are bound to prepare the way for the dead in the other world to provide them with food for their great journey into Yama’s realm and to supply them with for crossing the rivers. These ends are served by the Utkrānti or Vaitaraṇī cow, which in some cases has been presented to the Brāhmaṇa before the death of the deceased himself or his son. The same was originally, no doubt, the purpose also for the Anustaraṇī cow, which is led along in the funeral train and whose members are finally laid upon those of the dead, his kidneys being deposited into his hands to serve as foods to Yama’s dogs. The streams which have to be crossed are probably indicated by the piece of reed which is introduced into the wall of the tomb which is meant to serve as the boat’. (*E.R.E.*, Vol. 4, p. 473). In

the light of this passage, I suggest that the bulls anticipated the sacred Indian cow and that the left hand one, which is without the entrails is perhaps to be identified with the prototype of the Anustaraṇī and the right hand one with that of Vaitaraṇī cow. Some of the oldest references to the former are in the *Ṛgveda*, X.16.7; *Aśvālayana Grhya Sūtra*, IV.3; *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, III.3.8, *Kātyāyana Śrauta Sūtra* XXV.7.30; and to the latter in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, IV.44.65; *Mahābhārata*, II.373 and III.6054 and 8148; besides *Harivaṃśa* 7736 and 9511. The hound, as already remarked, is reminiscent of Yama's dog".

(*Excavations at Harappa*, by H.S. Vats, pp. 208-209).

The above passage would make it clear that the Harappan society did believe in the abode of Yama and the travels of the soul after the death. This aspect has been convincingly brought out by the excavator elsewhere also in his work.

The eminent archaeologists like R.S. Bist and others have, it is reported, also tried to establish a link between the Harappan culture and the Vedic culture on the basis of the finds from some recently excavated sites like Dholavira in Gujarat.

These instances go on to establish, besides the finding of the fire altars at the Harappan sites that some of the practices and the customs of the Vedic people were very much in vogue with the Harappans in one form or the other. Even the gods like Gaṇapati of the Vedic literature has been located from a seal from the Mohenjodaro site, though in this case his form is quite composite and it would be difficult to claim the seal to represent Gaṇapati truly, though the tusks and the elephant trunk are indeed found.

2

The Sky Gods

The Ādityas

This name signifies simply the descendants of Aditi. In one passage in the *Rgveda* the names of six are given—Mitra, Aryaman, Bhaga, Varuṇa, Dakṣa, and Aṁśa. In another passage they are said to be seven in number, though their names are not given. In a third verse eight is the number given; but “of the eight sons of Aditi who were born from her body, she approached the gods with seven, and cast out Mārtaṇḍa (the eighth)”. As the lists of names of these sons given in different parts of the Vedas do not agree with each other, it is difficult to know who were originally regarded as Ādityas. Judging from the number of hymns addressed to them, some of these deities occupied a conspicuous position in the Vedic pantheon whilst others are named once or twice only, and then in connection with their more illustrious brethren. In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* and the *Purāṇas*, the number of the Ādityas is increased to twelve. In addition to the six, whose names are given above, the following are also described in hymns of the *Rgveda* as the offspring of Aditi—Sūrya, “as an Āditya identified with Agni, is said to have been placed by the gods in the sky”, Savitṛ (and Indra too), is in one passage addressed as an Āditya along with Varuṇa and the Moon. In the *Taittirīya* texts the following eight are described as Ādityas—Mitra, Varuṇa, Aryaman, Aṁśa, Bhaga, Indra, and Vivasvat (Sūrya).

Professor Roth says of these deities—“In the highest heaven dwell and reign those gods who bear in common the name of Ādityas. We must, however, if we would discover their earliest character, abandon the conceptions which in a later age, and even in that of the heroic poems, were entertained regarding these deities. According to this conception, they were twelve sun-gods, there being evident reference to the twelve months. But for the most ancient period we must hold fast to the primary significance of their names. They are inviolable, imperishable eternal things. Aditi, Eternity, or the Eternal, is the element which sustains them, or is sustained by them. The eternal and inviolable element in which the Ādityas dwell, and which forms their essence, is the celestial light. The Ādityas, the gods of this light, do not therefore by any means coincide with any of the forms in which light is manifested in the universe. They are neither the sun, nor moon, nor stars, nor dawn, but the eternal sustainers of this luminous life, which exists as it were behind these phenomena.”

As noticed above, the text of the *Rgveda* says “of the eight sons who were born from the body of Aditi, she approached the gods with seven, but cast away the eighth.” In the commentary, the following explanation of this circumstance is given—“The eighth son was deformed. His brothers, seeing his deformity, improved his appearance. He was afterwards known as Vivasvat (the sun). From the superfluous flesh cut off his body an elephant was formed—hence the proverb, “Let no man catch an elephant, for the elephant partakes of the nature of man.”

This is, however, a common belief that these gods were called Ādityas because they were born of Aditi. Though there is no uniformity in the names and the number of Ādityas, the

Taittiriya texts has spelt out the names of the seven, but the *Purāṇas* speak quite differently on the subject, but their number is mentioned as twelve. The *Śrīmadbhāgavata Purāṇa* (6.6.39) has the list which is accepted by most of the *Purāṇas*—

विवस्वानर्यमापूषा त्वष्टाय सविता भगः।
धाता विधाता वरुणो मित्रः शक्र उरुक्रमः॥

In the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, *Amśa* has been put in place of *Vidhātā* which is possibly the same as *Amśa* in the *Rgveda*—

मारीचात् कश्यपाज्जाता आदिव्या दक्षकन्यया।
तत्र विष्णुश्च शक्रश्च जज्ञाते पुनरेव हि।
अर्यमा चैव धाता च त्वष्टा पूषा तथैव च।
विवस्वान् सविता चैव मित्रो वरुण एव च॥
अंशुर्भगशतितेजा आदित्या द्वादश स्मृतः॥

—*Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, 1.15.131-133

The *Matsya Purāṇa* while maintaining the number of *Ādityas* as twelve, replaces *Amśumān* with *Amśa* which is usually used as an epithet for the sun—

इन्द्रो धाता भगस्त्वष्टा मित्रोऽथ वरुणो यमः।
विवस्वान् सविता पूषा अंशुमान् विष्णुरेव च।
मारीचात् कश्यपादाप पुत्रानदितिरुत्तमान॥

—*Matsya Purāṇa*, 6.4-5

In another context, the *Matsya Purāṇa* omits the names of *Amśumān* and *Savitā*. Instead the names of *Dhanada* (*Kubera*) and *Parjanya* have been included—

इन्द्रोर्विष्णु भगत्वष्टा वरुणो हार्यमा रविः।
पूषा मित्रश्च धनदो धाता पर्जन्य एव च।

—*Ibid.*, 170.56

The *Vāyu Purāṇa* (66.73) on the other hand replaces *Amśa* with *Vidhātā* and *Parjanya* for *Savitā*. The list of *Ādityas* of the *Mahābhārata* (*Ādi-Parvan*—66.36-37) tallies with the list of *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* reading *Amśu* in place of *Amśa*—

अदित्यांद्वादशादिव्या सम्भूता भुवनेश्वराः।
धाता मित्रोऽर्यमा शक्रो वरुणस्त्वंश एव च।
भगो विवस्वान् पूषा च सविता द्वादशस्तथा।
एकादश तथा त्वष्टा द्वादशो विष्णु रुच्यते॥

In the *Harivaṃśa Purāṇa*, however, *Jayanta* has been also accepted in the list of *Ādityas*. Indeed *Jayanta* had been the son of *Indra* and possibly relates to the remote past because in some of the *Brāhmaṇa* texts, he appears in place of *Savitā* or *Vidhātā*. It may be recalled here that in the Vedic period the number of *Ādityas* was maintained as six, though in the post-Vedic

literature the figure of twelve was maintained. This has been spelt out in one of the early hymns of the *Rgveda* (II.27.1)—

इमा गिर आदित्येभ्यो धृतस्नूः सनाद्राजभ्यो जुहाजुहोनि।
शृणोति मित्रो अर्यमा भगो नस्तुविजातो वरुणो दक्षो अशः॥

In another hymn of the *Rgveda* (IX.114.3) the number has been increased to seven. In a comparatively later hymn it is stated that Aditi had eight sons. It is also, however, stated that out of these eight, she carried only seven to the gods, leaving Mārtaṇḍa, who is stated to have born of a dead egg, was left alone on earth and was subsequently patronised again—

अष्टो पुत्रासो अदितेयं जाता तन्वस्परि।
देवां उप प्रैत सत्पभिः परा मार्तण्डमास्यत्॥
ससभि पुत्रै रवितिरुपप्रैत् पूर्व युगम्।
प्रजायै मृत्यवे त्वत्युनर्माताण्डममरत्॥

—*Rgveda*, X.72.89

In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (8.1.3.3) there is a small tale according to which, Aditi had eight sons, but only seven of them were called as Ādityas. The eighth son named Mārtaṇḍa was deprived of the hands and feet and was just a loath of flesh. The Ādityas found that the eighth brother did not resemble their form and they therefore provided him with limbs as a result of which he also achieved the beautiful form—

अष्टौ ह वै पुत्रा अदितेः। यांस्त्वेतद्देवाः आदित्या इत्याचक्षते सप्त ह एव ते।
अविकृतं हाष्टमं जनयाञ्चकार मार्तण्डम्। सदेधो ह एवास यावानेव ऊर्ध्वं
स्तावास्तिर्यङ् पुरुषः सम्मितः इत्युहैके आहुः। ते उ ह एते ऊचुः देवा आदित्याः
यदस्मान् अजमिना तदमुया इव भूद् हन्त विकरवाम इति तं विचक्रुः यथा अयं
पुरुषो विकृतः। यम् उ ह तद् विचक्रुः सः विवस्वानादित्यस्तस्य इमाः प्रजाः।

There is a small account in the *Mahābhārata* (Śānti-Parvan, 243.57) according to which Aditi did not give away out of the food cooked for the victory of the gods, to Brahmacārī Buddha. As a result of this Aditi was cursed by Buddha that a dead egg would be born of her womb. Because of the birth of that dead egg Vivasvān known as Śrāddhadeva was known as Mārtaṇḍa—

अदितिर्वै देवानामन्नमपचद् एतद्भुक्त्वा असुरान् हनिष्यन्तीति। तत्र बुधो
व्रतचर्यासमाप्तौ आगच्छद् अदितिं चाबोचत् भिक्षां देहीति। तत्र देवैः पूर्वमेतत्
प्राश्यं नान्येन इत्यदितिः भिक्षां नादात्। अथ भिक्षाप्रत्याख्यानरुषितेन बुधेन ब्रह्मभूतेन
अदितिः शप्ता अदितेरुदरे भविष्यति व्यथा विवस्वतो द्वितीयजन्मन्यण्डसंज्ञितस्य
अण्डं मातुरदितया मारितं स मार्तण्डो विवस्वान् अभवत् श्राद्धदेवः।

In the *Harivaṃśa Purāṇa* (5.5.49), it is stated that the son of Kaśyapa, unknowingly said that it was not dead but is contained in the egg, as a result of which the dead child was brought back to life and was given the name of Mārtaṇḍa.

न खल्वयं मृतोऽण्डस्थ इति स्नेहादभाषत।
अज्ञानात् कश्यपस्तस्माद् मार्तण्ड इति चोच्यते॥

After the birth of Mārtaṇḍa, Aditi became the mother of eight sons. This is repeated in the *Samhitās* and the *Brāhmaṇa* literature. It has already been pointed out that in the *Taittirīya Samhitā*, the number of the Ādityas has been given as eight and the same has been repeated in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (1.1.9.1.)—

अदितिः पुत्रकामा साध्येभ्यो देवेभ्यो ब्रह्मौदनमपचत्। तस्यै उच्छेषणमददुः तत्
प्राशनात् सा रेतोऽधत्त धाता च अर्यमा च अजायेताम्। सा द्वितीयमपचत् तस्यै
मित्रश्च वरुणश्चाजायेताम्। सा तृतीयमपचत् तस्यै अंशश्च भगश्चाजायेताम्।
चतुर्थमपचत् तस्यै इन्द्रश्च विवस्वाश्चाजायेताम्॥

In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, the number of Ādityas was increased from eight to twelve. The text is silent about their being the sons of Aditi. On the question of their birth the text says that when the speech of Prajāpati was united with his mind then she conceived at twelve points and ultimately twelve Ādityas were born, who were established by Prajāpati in different quarters. Indeed in the mysterious expression of the *Brāhmaṇa* texts, this points to the mental creation of Prajāpati. There is a mental form of creation in the religious texts according to which, Prajāpati, just thought in his mind about some creation and the desired thing was created with the mere speech or uttering of the words—

स मनसा एव वाचं मिथुनं समभवत् सा द्वादश द्रष्टान् गर्भ्यभवत् ते द्वादशादित्याः
असृज्यन्त तान् दिव्युपादधात्। —*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 6.1.2.8

There is a story in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (6.5.8.9), according to which Ṇgirasas agreed to perform the *yajña* of Ādityas. After the completion of the *yajña*, Ṇgirasas were given away land by the Ādityas. After the taking over of the land by Ṇgirasas, the land started burning and turning to a lioness she started devouring the people. The Ādityas then in turn gave away the white horse in the shape of sun and got back the land. The story is also retold with some modifications in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (3.5.1.13-19). The story was also developed in the *Brahma Purāṇa* (155.1-14) with some changes and the Kapilā cow has been replaced for the white horse—

गौतम्या दक्षिणे पारे आदित्यान् मुनिसत्तम।
अयाजयन्न्गिरसो दक्षिणां ते भुवं ददुः।
अंगिरोभ्यस्तदादित्याः तपसेऽगिरसो ददुः।
सा भूमिः सैहिकी भूत्वा जनान् सर्वानभक्षयत्॥३॥
तत्रसुप्ते जनाः सर्वे अंगिरोभ्यो न्यवेदयन्।
आदित्याननुगत्वाथ वाचमंगिरसोऽब्रुवन्।
भुवं गृह्णन्तु या दत्ता नेत्यादित्यास्तदाब्रुवन्।
निवृत्तां दक्षिणां नैव प्रतिगृह्णन्ति सूरयः।

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तथापि क्रयरूपेण गृहीमो दक्षिणां भुवम्।
तथेत्युक्ते तु ते देवाः कपिलां शुभलक्षणाम्।
गंगायाः दक्षिणे पारे भुवः स्थाने तु तां ददुः।

It appears that the idea of conceiving Ādityas as Ṛṣis had gained considerable ground in the *Brāhmaṇa* texts. This is supported by the fact that in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (Ch. 13), several Ṛṣis are stated to have been created out of the *tejas* of Prajāpati, which include Ādityas. There is another story of the birth of Ādityas according to which, Prajāpati, getting infested with passion at the look of his own daughter, his semen fell which was turned into a tank. The fire surrounded it in order to save it from destruction. The wind started blowing over it. A part of it started shining because of its burning by fire and they were known as Ādityas—

इदं प्रजापतेः रेतः सिक्तमधावत्। तत् सरोऽभवत्। ते देवाः अद्भुवन् मेदं रेतो
दुषेदिति। तदग्निना वैश्वानरेण पर्यादधुः। तन्मरुतः अधून्वत्। तदग्निर्वैश्वानरः
प्राच्यावयत्। तस्य यद् रेतसः तृतीयम् अदेदीदिवत् (तद्) आदित्या अभवन्।

—*Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, 3.3.9.10

The religious texts of the Hindus also testify that the twelve Ādityas stand for twelve months of the year. In the *Mahābhārata*, it is testified that twelve Ādityas were born out of the womb of Aditi, who stand for form of Sūrya alone—

द्वादशैते समाख्याता आदित्याः सूर्यरूपिणः।
अदितेर्गर्भसम्भूताः सर्वदेवपुरोगमाः॥

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—*Mahābhārata* (Ādi Parvan, 65.14-15)

The Upaniṣads also support the idea that the twelve Ādityas stand for twelve months of the year. As for example, the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (3.9.5) also testifies similarly. These months carry all the things of the universe pervading everywhere and are given the name of Ādityas—

कतमे आदित्या इति। द्वादशमासाः संवत्सरस्य एते आदित्याः। एते हि इदं सर्वम्
आददाना यान्ति। यद् इदं सर्वम् आददाना यन्ति तस्माद् आदित्या इति॥

Śrīmadbhāgavata Purāṇa (5.22.3) testifies that Sūrya is the form of the Vedas, besides being the Primeval person and moves the universe. He regulates all the seasons like the spring and others in twelve months—

स एष भगवानादिपुरुषः.... लोकानां स्वस्तये आत्मानं त्रयीमयं कर्मशुद्धिनिमित्तं
द्वादशधा विभज्य षट्सु वसन्तादिषु ऋतुषु यथोपजोषम् ऋतुगुणान् विदधाति।

The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (2.10.2) goes on to declare that the sun regulates the universe in twelve months in the form of the Ādityas—

स रथोऽधिष्ठितो देवैरादित्यैर्ऋषिभिः तथा॥

The different months allotted to each one of the Ādityas are given as under—

1. Caitra (March-April)	Dhātā
2. Vaisākha (April-May)	Aryama
3. Jyestha (May-June)	Mitra
4. Āṣāḍha (June-July)	Varuṇa
5. Śrāvaṇa (July-August)	Indra
6. Bhādrapada (August-September)	Vivasvān
7. Āśvin (September-October)	Puṣā
8. Kārtika (October-November)	Parjanya
9. Mārgaśīrṣa (November-December)	Amśa
10. Pauṣa (December-January)	Bhaga
11. Māgha (January-February)	Tvastā
12. Phālguna (February-March)	Viṣṇu

In the second Maṇḍala of the *R̥gveda* (Sūkta-27), sufficient details of the Ādityas' qualities have been spelt out. They have been known as spotless, chaste, sinless, without blemish, invincible, grand, deep and having several eyes—

आदित्यासः शुचयो धारपूता अवृजिना अनवद्या अरिष्टाः॥१२॥
त आदित्यास उरवो गभीरा अदब्धासो दिप्सन्तो भूर्यक्षाः॥१३॥

It is further stated therein, that the Ādityas neither sleep nor wink their eyes and no one on earth can deceive them. They are said to be all-seeing gods, who protect the people—

अस्वप्नजो अनिमिषा अदब्धा उरुशंसा ऋजवे मर्त्याय॥१९॥

They are competent enough to peep into the minds of the people and quite well distinguish between the cheats as well as the noble people. All the things placed at considerable distance are quite approachable to them—

1. अन्तः पश्यन्ति वृजनोत साध सर्वं राजभ्यः परमा चिदन्ति॥ 2.27.3
2. पाकत्रा स्थन देवाः हत्सु जानीथ मर्त्यम्॥ ऋग्वेद, 8.18.15

They are said to protect all the moveable and immoveable things of the world. They are of quite a pious nature. Their principles are always eternal; they hate falsehood and punish the sinners—

धारयन्त आदित्यासो जगत् स्था देवा विश्वस्य भुवनस्य गोपाः।
दीर्घाधियो रक्षमाणा असुर्यमृतावानश्चयमाना ऋणानि॥

—2.27.4

Out of the Ādityas, particularly Mitra and Varuṇa are invoked for the removal of the sins (*R̥gveda*, II.27.14). Those who are protected by Ādityas, are well protected against all the dangers in the same way as a warrior is protected by a *kavaca*—

युष्मे देवा अपि ष्मसि युध्यन्त इव वर्मसु॥

—*Rgveda*, 8.47.8

The same form of Ādityas is available in the *Atharvaveda* (II.12.4) and the space is said to be their abode. The soul after the death of a person reaches their abode mounted over the divine chariot. The same text (*Ibid.*, VII.7.1) describes their abode as the deep ocean—

तेषां हि धाम गभिषक् समुद्रियं नैतान् नमसा परो अस्ति किञ्चन॥

They protect the people from their enemies (*Ibid.*, IX.2.15) and at the time of the battle, accompany their devotee to the battlefield and protect them (*Ibid.*, V.21.10). Varuṇa has been described as to be the leader of the Ādityas in the *Taittirīya Saṁhitā* (6.22) and *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, but during the subsequent times the leadership of Ādityas was given over to Indra who was born initially out of the womb of Aditi. He is, therefore, considered to be the chief of the Ādityas. Though Viṣṇu enjoys the lowermost position in the list of Ādityas, but due to his dominating qualities he enjoys considerable importance according to the Ādi Parvan (66-67) of the *Mahābhārata*—

जघन्यजस्तु सर्वेषामादित्यानां गुणाधिकः।

—*Mahābhārata* (Ādi Parvan 66-67)

In the *Padma Purāṇa* (7.20), the sons of Aditi have been considered to be the best of all. In the *Harivaṁśa* (vs. 11548) and *Matsya Purāṇa* (179.57) also describes both of them to be the best.

इत्येते द्वादशादित्या वरिष्ठास्त्रिदिवौकसः।

The Ādityas, however, are also found mentioned in the *Purāṇas* in the context of the transmigration of the soul or the cycle of the rebirth. The Ādityas, who were considered to be eternal in the Vedic literature, were relegated to the position of mortals alone, their life span, having been limited to a *Manvantara*. All of them are said to be reborn after taking to a new form after every *Manvantara*. It is stated in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (1.15.128-130, 134) that Ādityas were Tuṣita gods in the earlier *Cakṣus Manvantara*. After the end of the *Manvantara* they are said to have been reborn out of the womb of Aditi and thus earned the name of Ādityas—

पूर्वमन्वन्तरे श्रेष्ठाः द्वादशासन् सुरोत्तमाः।

तुषिता नाम तेऽन्योन्यम् ऊचुर्वैवस्वतेऽन्तरे॥

उपस्थितेऽतियशसश्चाक्षुषस्यान्तरे मनोः।

समवायीकृताः सर्वे समागम्य परस्परम्॥

आगच्छत द्रुतं देवा अदितिं सम्प्रविश्य वै।

मन्वन्तरे प्रसूयामस्तन्नः श्रेयो भवेदिति॥

एवमुक्त्वा तु ते सर्वे चाक्षुषस्यान्तरे मनोः।

मारीचात् काश्यपाज्जाता अदित्या दक्षकन्यया॥

चाक्षुषस्यान्तरे पूर्वमासन् ये तुषिता सुराः।

वैवस्वतेऽन्तरे ते वै आदित्या द्वादश स्मृताः॥

The chapters 66 and 67 of the *Vāyu Purāṇa* highlights about the seven births of the Ādityas from the beginning of the *kalpas*. Accordingly in the beginning of the *kalpa*, out of the mouth of Prajāpati twelve Manus viz., Darśa, Purnamasa, Br̥hat, Rathantara, Akuta, Akṛti, Vitti, Suvitti, Kutī, Adhiṣṭa, Aditi and Vijñapti were born. These Manus are also described as the group of gods. All of them have the mantra-like form. (In reality, all these names are associated with the sacrificial practice). Brahmā asked all of them to engage themselves in the creation of the universe, but instead, all of them engaged themselves in the practices of achieving salvation. As a result of this, Brahmā cursed them to be born on earth seven times. Thus in the *Svayambhu Manvantara*, a god named Ajita was born out of the womb of Ajitā; in the *Svarṇeisa Manvantara* a *gaṇa* named *Suṣita* was born out of the womb of Tuṣitā; in the *Aultima Manvantara* a *gaṇa* named Satya was born out of the womb Satyā; in the *Tāmasa Manvantara*, from the womb of Hāryā, a *gaṇa* named Hari was born and in the *Rivata Manvantra*, out of the womb of Nikuṣṭha, Vaikuṇṭha *gaṇa* was born. In the sixth *Manvantra* named Cakṣuṣa, out of the womb of the wife of Dharmā, named Sādhyā, Sādhyā *gaṇa* was born and in the current *Vaivasvata Manvantara*, out of the womb of Aditi, Ādityas were born.

The above account is somewhat curious, and does not tally favourably with the accounts of other texts on the subject. Particularly the birth of Viṣṇu at the beginning of every *Manvantara* and his disappearing at the end of each one of the *Manvantara* does not tally with the accounts about the lord in other texts. It is quite possible that the problem could be solved by separating lord Viṣṇu from Viṣṇu as *gaṇa*, but it does not appear to be quite satisfactory because Viṣṇu as Upendra does not find mention in the earlier *Manvantaras* nor is the birth of Viṣṇu from Brahmā could be treated as convincing. Not only that the frequent births of Indra and Varuṇa are seldom met with in the religious texts. It could, however, be possible that the author of the *Vāyu Purāṇa* considers Viṣṇu, Varuṇa and others as totally separate from the Āditya-*gaṇas*. But *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* accepts the theory of the birth of all the higher gods. The text also testifies about the controversy about the birth of thirty-three gods—

सर्वे देवगणास्तात त्रयस्त्रिंशत्तुल्यन्दजाः
तेषामपीह सततं निरोधोत्पत्तिरुच्यते॥

1.15.139.

Indeed the various texts speak about the names of Ādityas variously and there is no uniformity in the list of Ādityas in these texts. Broadly speaking the names of the Ādityas spelt out by different texts are given as under, the descriptive details of which would be available in the account that follows—

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------|------------------|
| 1. Dhātā | 2. Vidhātā | 3. Mitra |
| 4. Varuṇa | 5. Aryama | 6. Arṇśa |
| 7. Vivasvān | 8. Bhaga | 9. Puṣaṇ |
| 10. Savitā | 11. Āśvins | 12. Parjanya |
| 13. Traṣṭa or Viśvakarmā | 14. Urukrama | 15. Mitra-Varuṇa |
| 16. Indra | 17. Viṣṇu | 18. Sūrya |

The descriptive details about Viṣṇu, Sūrya and Indra have been discussed elsewhere in this work.

Details of Ādityas available in various texts

<i>Āitareya Brāhmaṇa</i>	<i>Mahābhārata</i>	<i>Taittirīya Sāṃhitā</i>	<i>Bhāgavata Purāṇa</i>	<i>Matsya Purāṇa (6.4-5)</i>	<i>Viṣṇu Purāṇa</i>	<i>Matsya Purāṇa (170.56)</i>	<i>Harivaṃśa Purāṇa</i>	<i>Brahmā Purāṇa</i>	<i>Vāyu Purāṇa (66.66)</i>
Mitra	Mitra	Mitra	Mitra	Mitra	Mitra	Mitra			Mitra
Varuṇa	Varuṇa	Varuṇa	Varuṇa	Varuṇa	Varuṇa	Varuṇa Sūrya			Varuṇa
Aryamā	Aryamā	Aryaman	Aryamā	Aryamā Viṣṇu	Aryamā Viṣṇu	Aryamā Viṣṇu			Aryamā
Amśa	Amśa	Amśu	Urukrama	Amśu	—	Parjanya			Amśa Parjanya
Indra	Indra	Indra	Indra	Indra	Indra	Indra			Indra
Vivasvān	Vivasvān Puṣā Viṣṇu Tvaṣṭā Savitā	Vivasvat	Vivasvat Puṣā	Vivasvān Puṣā	Vivasvān Puṣā	Puṣā Dhanada Tvaṣṭā			Vivasvān Puṣā Parjanya Tvaṣṭā Viṣṇu
Bhaga	Bhaga	Bhaga	Bhaga	Bhaga	Bhaga	Bhaga			Bhaga
Dhātā	Dhātā		Dhātā Vidhātā	Dhātā	Dhātā Amsu	Dhātā			Dhātā

1 & 2. Dhātā and Vidhātā

Dhātā who happens to be one of the Ādityas is quite close to Tvaṣṭā. He performs several of the actions in association with Tvaṣṭā. If Tvaṣṭā has been described to be the one who carries the bride to the place of performing the marriage, Dhātā helps the girl in the selection of a suitable match. The girl thus gets the husband according to her liking. It is prescribed in the *Atharvaveda* that because of the capacity to hold on or to consecrate, possessed by the god, he has been given the name of Dhātā—

सोम जुष्टं ब्रह्मजुष्टमर्मयम्णा संभृत भगम्।
धातु देवस्य सत्येन कृणोमि पति वेदनम्॥

—*Atharvaveda*, II.36.2

(Served by Somadeva and Gandharvadeva and accepted by the fire called Aryama, the treasure in the form of a maiden, we truthfully make her suitable for the husband.)

In the same text, he has been described to be the god who plants the embryo in the womb of a lady and nourishes the same for ten months—वातः श्रेष्ठेन रूपेणास्या नर्वा गवीन्यो। पुमांसथेहि दशमे मासि सुतवे॥ (*Ibid.*, V.25.10). The name of Dhātā is usually associated with Vidhātā and Smṛdha. Vidhātā is considered to be the god of creation or construction, Dhātā is known for preservation and Smṛdha is meant for the development—

धात्रे विधात्रे समृधे भूतस्य पतये यजे॥

—*Ibid.*, III.10.10

The *Bṛhaddevatā* testifies that Dhātā was born out of the womb of Aditi as one of her twelve sons—

भगश्चैवार्यमांशश्च धाता चैव विधाता च विवस्वांश्च महाद्युति॥

—*Bṛhaddevatā*, 5.147

3. Mitra

The mention of the god Mitra is not commonly found in the Vedic texts, though he is frequently mentioned in combination of Varuṇa—Mitra-Varuṇa. But in the composite god, the role of Mitra is quite insignificant. But Varuṇa, on the other hand, is projected to be quite a powerful god. Mitra has been adored only in one Sūkta of the *Ṛgveda* (III.59), in which only a couple of his qualities are highlighted. Mitra having been adored by the people, inspires them and collects them at one place—

मित्रो जनान् यातयति ब्रुवाणो मित्रो दाधार पृथिवीमुतद्याम्।

मित्रः कृष्टीरनिमिषाभि चष्टे मित्राय हव्यं धृतकज्जुहोत॥

—*Ṛgveda*, 3.59.1

Almost all the gods of the Vedic period are conceived to contain the earth and the sky but Mitra enjoys the title of “यत्तयज्जन” (यातयज्जनो गृणते सुरोवः। *Ibid.*, III.59.5). For Agni, it has been pointed out that he also behaves like Mitra. The same phrase has been used for Mitra-Varuṇa (V.72.2) and Mitra-Aryamā (I.136.3). Indeed, it is Varuṇa, who can continuously gaze at the deeds of the humans. Like Varuṇa, Mitra is also termed to be the guardian of all the vows. He can not be overpowered by anyone nor can anyone else defeat him. He can also not be influenced with any ailments—

प्र स मित्र मर्त्यो अस्तु प्रयस्वान् यस्त आदित्य शिक्षति व्रतेन।

न हन्यते न जीयते त्योतो नैनमहो अश्नोत्यन्ततो न दूरात्॥ (5.39.2)

In the *Atharvaveda* (XIII.3.13) Varuṇa is associated with the evenings while Mitra is associated with the mornings (*Ibid.*, IX.3.18). The hymns further desire Mitra to illumine the morning, which had been concealed by Varuṇa. These indications make one to believe that Mitra was linked with Sūrya. In the *Ṛgveda* (V.3.1) the lighted fire has been conceived to be the form Mitra—

त्वमग्ने वरुणो जायसे यत्त्वं मित्रो भवसि यत्समिद्धः।

Possibly in this background, it has been stated in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, that the wood with particles of fire in them, could be equated with Mitra. They are not harmful, at that time. Mitra is believed to be friendly to all and does not cause injury to anyone—

अथ यत्रैतत् प्रतितरामिव तिरश्चीवार्चिः संशाम्यतो भवति। तर्हि हैष भवति मित्रः।

यमाहुः सर्वस्य वा अयं ब्राह्मणो मित्रम्। न वा अयं कंचन हिनस्ति।

This aspect of Mitra has been particularly emphasised in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*. In the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* (5.1.6), it has been brought out that Mitra is the friendliest of all the gods (मित्रो वै शिवो देवानाम्). While in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* it has been pointed out that Mitra does not harm to anyone, and as such no one can harm Mitra. No one can pierce a thorn in his body or cause a wound to him—

न वै मित्रः कंचन हिनस्ति। सर्वस्य हि एव मित्रो मित्रम्। न मित्रं कश्चन
हिनस्ति। नैनं कुशो न कण्टको विभिनत्ति। नास्य व्रणश्चनास्ति।

As Mitra has been described as the one who ensures the faithful compliance of the terms of agreement, in Avesta, similarly in the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* (2.1.8) there is an important passage which declares that the one getting engaged in a war, intends to have a treaty drawn, he should adore Mitra—

मैत्रमालभेत संग्रामे संयत्ते समयकामी मित्रमेव स्वेन भागधेयेन उपधावति। स
एवैनं मित्रेण संनयति।

The above passage would amply justify the persence of Mitra in the treaty between Hittites and Mitani races about 3400 years back. In the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā*, Mitra has been equated with Sūrya. In the *Vājasneyī Saṃhitā* (36.18), it is prayed that all should look at one another with the eyes of Mitra—

मित्रस्य चक्षुषा समीक्षामहे।
मित्रस्याहं चक्षुषा सर्वाणि भूतानि समीक्षे।
मित्रस्य मा चक्षुषा सर्वाणि भूतानि समीक्षन्ताम्।

There is no doubt that the conception of Mitra's look with kind eyes denotes for friendship, sympathy, love and welfare, the example of which is available in the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* (2.6.8) in which it is stated that "I look to you with the eyes of the Sun, who does not do any harm to anyone"—

सूर्यस्य त्वा चक्षुषा प्रतिपश्यामि इत्यब्रवीत्।
न हि सूर्यस्य चक्षुः कंचन हिनस्ति।

Like Puṣaṇ, Mitra too finds mention in the *Mahābhārata* only when names of all the gods are required to be mentioned. As for example in the Ādi Parvan (122.26), Mitra is included in the list of gods who arrived at the time of the birth of Arjuna and the burning of the Khāṇḍava forest (*Ibid.*, 226.37), and at the time of the blessing of Skanda (Śalya Parvan). In the Purāṇas, however, Mitra is hardly mentioned as the god.

4. Varuṇa

In the group of the Vedic gods Varuṇa is held in high esteem, though Indra has his own importance among them and maximum number of hymns are devoted to him (Indra). Though Indra had his own importance because of his consumption of Soma juice and the killing of the demon Vṛtra, but morally speaking, Varuṇa enjoys a much higher position as compared to Indra.

Varuṇa has been projected in the Vedic literature as possessing the great prowess and follower of strict discipline and great intelligence. All the gods are stated to follow the rules prescribed by him. Yask, the composer of *Nirukta* (10.4) has stated that the god is called Varuṇa, because he overshadows everyone. In the *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* (1.7) the formation of the word has been spelt out, which is traced to the root वृ. Basically he represents the one who overshadows the sky (like clouds). He spreads beyond the stage the human eye can reach and is said to be expanding beyond horizon. The ancient Aryans conceived him to be the one who could be omnipresent, omnipotent. The Western scholars believe that Varuṇa was particularly associated with the sky in the night. The eyesight during the night is somewhat restricted and the sky seems to be much reduced. The devotees of Varuṇa therefore conceive him to be quite closer to him during the night. This theory seems to have been based on factual justifications because the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (4.2.4) testifies to Mitra and Varuṇa, governing the day and night respectively. That is why a white animal has been prescribed for Mitra and black for Varuṇa. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* on the other hand also prescribes the black colour for Varuṇa.

Uranus and Ahura-Mazda are the Iranian and Greek counterparts of Varuṇa. In the Vedic literature the term ruler or the emperor has been used basically for Varuṇa. In *Rgveda* (II.27.10) he has been described to be the ruler of the creatures including the humans, gods and the demons. He has been called the ruler of the universe (*Rgveda*, VII.87.6).

The morality of the character of Varuṇa, was mainly highlighted in the *Rgveda*. This could be the reason that the other qualities of his nature and the details of his body structure were overshadowed by the moral aspect of Varuṇa. The eyes of Varuṇa were frequently mentioned, by which, Varuṇa keep an eye on the activities of all the creatures, while remaining engaged in his routine assignments. (येन पावकं चक्षुषा भुरण्यन्तं जनां अनु। त्वं वरुण पश्यसि॥ I.50.6) Since the eyes of Varuṇa have the vision of long range, he earned an epithet of उरु चक्षुः॥ Evidently this eye of Varuṇa is none else than Sūrya himself. The Vedas also describe Sūrya as the eye of Mitra or Varuṇa or both of them. (उद् वा चक्षुर्वरुण सुप्रतीकं देवयोरेति सूर्यस्ततन्वान्॥ VII.61.1). A sheet of golden colour is stated to cover the body of Varuṇa and is clad in shining garments. (विभ्रद् द्रापि हिरण्यं वरुणो वस्त्रं निर्णिजम्॥ I.25.13). In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, Varuṇa is described to be of fair complexion, having a golden figure and yellowish eyes. (साक्षादेव वरुणमवयजते शुक्लस्य खलते विक्लियस्य, पिंगलाक्षस्यमूर्धनिजुहोति॥ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 13.3.6.5.).

The text of the *Rgveda* also describes the abode of Varuṇa; his palace is believed to be golden in colour which is lodged in the sky. (आ यद् योनि हिरण्यं वरुण मित्र सदध॥ V.67.2). His abode is stated to have been spread in gigantic proportions and is supported by thousands of pillars. (वहन्तं गर्तं माशाते, V.68.5; सहस्रं स्तूप आसाते॥ II.41.5). Residing in such an abode he keeps an eye over the working of all the people. (अतो विश्वा न्यद्भूता चिकित्वां अनि पश्यति॥ I.25.11). Even the sun is stated to visit the palace of Varuṇa in order to provide him the account of the day's happenings daily. (*Rgveda*, VII.60.1).

Varuṇa has prescribed some definite *Vratas* to be performed daily and all the movements of the universe are regulated according to these principles. The sky and the earth are lodged in their proper places because of the principles laid down by Varuṇa. (अतस्तन्नात् द्यामसुरो विश्ववेदा अभिमीत वरिमाणं पृथिव्याः। आसीदद् विश्वा भुवनानि सम्राट् विश्वेतानि वरुणस्य ब्रतानि॥ VIII.42.1 and VI.70.1). It is he who has established the sun in the space (*dhyuloka*) illuminating it (VII.86.1), and has also regulated the path of the sun's daily movement (I.24.8). He is also said to have planted noble thoughts in the minds of the people, besides fire in the water and Soma in the mountains (II.85.2). Varuṇa regulates the activities of the earth with the application of the principles prescribed by him (V.63.7). The principles laid down by Varuṇa are applicable even at the remote corners wherever the horses of Sūrya are unable to reach. (ऋतेन ऋतमपिहितं ध्रुवं वां सूर्यस्य यत्र विमुच्यन्त्यश्वान्॥ *Rgveda*, V.32.1). It is further stated that the territory of the influence of Varuṇa is so vast that the birds in the sky as well as the long range rivers will not be able to measure the same. (न हि ते क्षत्रं न सहो न मन्यु वयश्चनामी पतयन्त आयुः। नेमा आपो अनिमिषं चरन्ति *Rgveda*, I.24.6). The *Rgveda* (VII.64.2) also associates Varuṇa with water and he has also been described as the lord of the rivers and the oceans. He is also said to be roaming in the oceanic waters (I.161.16), who has also formed boundaries for the same (*Rgveda*, VII.87.6). All the seven big rivers are said to fall into the mouth of Varuṇa in the ocean. (*Rgveda*, VIII.69.12). Varuṇa has also been termed as the lord of a thousand *oṣadhis* possibly because of his association with water. He is also invoked to ward off ailments and the death—रातं ते राजन् भिषजः सहस्रम् उर्वो गभीरा सुमतिष्ठं अस्तु। वाधस्व दूरे निऋति पराचैः कृतं चिद् एनः प्रमु मुग्धि अस्मात्॥ (*Ibid.*, I.24.9)

In the *Atharvaveda* too some more hymns are found where the name of Varuṇa has been found mentioned at least at 150 places. He has been conceived in the *Atharvaveda* (I.3.3) as the one who possesses great prowess, fulfiller of thousands of desires. The text also testifies that Varuṇa closely watches the activities of all the people. Even if someone commits some sin stealthily, it cannot go unnoticed by Varuṇa. He remains aware of everyone's activities, stationary or moving. At all the places where the sin is committed by two secretly, the third person is always present there in the form of Varuṇa—

बृहन्नेवामधिष्ठाता अन्तिकादिव पश्यति।
यस्तायन्मन्यते चरन् सर्व देवा इवा विदुः॥
यस्तिष्ठति चरति यश्च वञ्चति यो निलायं चरति यः प्रतंकम्।
द्वौ संनिषद्य यन्मंत्रेते राजा तद् वरुणस्तृतीय॥

—*Atharvaveda*, VI.16.1-2

In the *Atharvaveda* (III.4.5-6), Varuṇa has also been conceived as a king and as such for the purpose of the revenue collection several of the magical rites have been prescribed.

In the *Śukla Yajurveda* only six Sūktas are dedicated to him, all of which move on the lines of the *Rgvedic* text. Evidently in the *Yajurveda*, Varuṇa's glory as enjoyed by him in the *Rgveda* has been on the decline. In the *Yajurveda* (VIII.37) Indra has been described as *Samrāt* (or king) while Varuṇa is reduced to the position of a ruler (*rājā*) only. (इन्द्रश्च सम्राट् वरुणश्च राजा). Again

(in X.30), Varuṇa has been described to be the lord of strength and (in X.28), he has been called as Satyauja. In the *Yajurveda* (VIII.23) the noose (*pāśa*) has been associated with Varuṇa (नमो वरुणाय अभिष्टितो वरुणस्य पाशः). Again the sons of Aditi pray for the neutralization of the effect of the *pāśa* of Varuṇa (XXII.12).

In the epics and Purāṇas, Varuṇa is the lord of the steed whose entire body is white but one ear is black. In the *Śrīmadbhāgavata Purāṇa* (9.15.6-7) Gādhī, for performing marriage of his daughter Satyavati with Reika demands a thousand of such horses. He collects the horses from Varuṇa. The seeds of this idea could be traced in the *Yajurveda* (XXIX.58) wherein it has been prescribed that a completely black horse with one hoof (or leg) being white, would belong to Varuṇa.

The *Taittirīya Saṁhitā* (6.6.2) goes on to testify that oceanic waters are the abode of Varuṇa and as such the ceremonial bath for Varuṇa is taken in the water alone. The devotee therefore appeases Varuṇa in his own home alone—

अपो अवभृथमवैति। अप्सु वै वरुणः। साक्षादेव वरुणमवयजते॥

The same text also mentions about the *pāśa* of Varuṇa, which is used for the sinful persons—

वरुण एवं वरुणपाशेन गृह्णाति पाप्मनागृहीतो भवति। —*Ibid.*, (2.3.13)

The *pāśa* of Varuṇa has been mentioned in the (6.6.3) of the *Taittirīya Saṁhitā*.

Hardly any change is noticed in the form of Varuṇa in the Brāhmaṇas, though he appears in these texts to be an ordinary type of a Vedic god before the great personalities like Prajāpati. He, no doubt, receives his due share of the sacrifice but no one feels terrorised by him because his might has been on the decline. Still he continues to be the king because in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (5.4.3.10) it has been clearly stated that Varuṇa is the king of the gods (वरुणो वै देवानां राजा). It is further testified in the same text that Varuṇa had performed the *Rājasūya-yajña*, which is usually performed by Cakravarti kings (*Ibid.*, 5.4.3.1 and 5.4.3.21)—

वरुणाद् ह वा अभिषिषिचानाद्। वरुणसवो वा एष यद्रजसूयमिति। वरुणो अकरोदिति त्वेवैय एतत्करोति॥

In the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, Varuṇa enjoys a respectable position as a king, which is reflected in an episode which highlights the fact that because of Soma internal bickerings the gods were defeated by the demons. They thereafter resolved that all of them should keep their bodies with Varuṇa and should not get back the same in case any one was deceitful—

.... ते अब्रुवन् हन्त या एव न इमा प्रियतमा तन्वाः ता अस्य वरुणस्य राज्ञो गृहे सनिदधाम ह एताभिः एव नः सः न संगच्छातै यो न एतद् अतिकामदय आलुलोभयिषाद् इति॥

—*Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, 1.4.7

In the *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa* (5.4 and 18.4) it has been stated that Varuṇa resides in the waters and as such the offerings for Varuṇa should be made in the water alone and by doing so,

the performer can please Varuṇa in his own home. The *pāśa* of Varuṇa has also been mentioned in the *Kauśītaki Brāhmaṇa* (5.3). In this connection, there is a story according to which, from a *Vaisvadeva-yajña*, Prajāpati once begot a son. Soon after the birth, the child started eating the *yava* of Varuṇa. Thereafter Varuṇa bound him with his *pāśa*. The child then went to Prajāpati and requested him to tell him a way out to please Varuṇa. Prajāpati then pleased Varuṇa by making suitable offerings to him as a result of which all of them were released of the bondage.

Coming to *Gṛhya Sūtras*, there has been further decrease in the importance of Varuṇa. Indeed the true nature of the Vedic gods was overshadowed by the ritualistic practices of the *Gṛhya Sūtras*, and their importance met with further decline. Of the various qualities of Varuṇa mentioned in the Vedic texts, only a few of them were highlighted in the *Gṛhya Sūtras*. In the *Ṛgveda*, Varuṇa is a mighty god and quite a powerful one who remains aware of everything. On the basis of this *Khadira Gṛhya Sūtra* (2.2.35) at the time of the name-giving ceremony of the newly born, the hymns of Mitra and Varuṇa are recited seeking the increase in the intelligence and strength of the child. In due course of time Varuṇa also came to be known as '*Praceta*' (or the intelligent one). Varuṇa was also invoked at the time of the first entry into a new house. In this connection it may be recalled that in the *Ṛgveda* it has been described that Varuṇa has a palatial mansion with a thousand pillars. The adoration of Varuṇa at the time of first entry into the new house has possibly been prescribed keeping the same in view. Since Varuṇa has also been associated with *Vratas* and principles, he is, therefore, invoked in the *yajñopavīta* ceremony in which the Brahmacārī is warned that he would have to observe the rules since his hand has been held by Varuṇa.

During the period of the epics and the Purāṇas we are made to face an entirely different type of gods who possess definite form and are quite active. The somewhat hazy figures of the gods of the *Gṛhya Sūtras* have emerged as distinctly clear in the epics and the Purāṇas. Varuṇa now is no more the lord of the three worlds and is now reduced to the exclusive charge of the waters. In the Śānti Parvan (47.9-10) of the *Mahābhārata*, it has been stated that Prajāpati made Varuṇa as the lord of the waters, which is also supported by the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (1.22.3). In the Ādi Parvan (224.1-3) of the same epic, Varuṇa has been described as the dweller of the waters, besides being the lord of waters. This aspect is also supported by the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (3.17.29) which further testifies (3.17.25) that when Hiraṇyākṣa jumped into the oceanic waters, the soldiers of Varuṇa fled away in panic—

तस्मिन् प्रविष्टे वरुणस्य सैनिकाः यादोगणाः सन्निधयः ससाध्वसाः।
अहन्यमाना अपि तस्य वर्चसा प्रघर्षिता दूरतरं प्रदुद्रुवः॥

The capital of Varuṇa has been described as Vibhāvārī which is located in the deep oceanic waters—

मौर्व्याभिजज्णे गदया विभावरीम् आसेदिवान् तात पुरीं प्रचेतसः।

—*Ibid.*, (3.17.26)

The divine palace of Varuṇa is also described in the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, having the lustre of the white clouds and resembling the Kailāśa mountain in height—

ततः पाण्डुरमेघानं कैलासमिवभास्वरम्।
वरुणस्यालयं दिव्यम् अपश्यद् राक्षसाधिपः॥

—*Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, 7.23.20

In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Varuṇa has been described as the ruler of the nether-world, possessing the great prowess and who could defeat his wild enemies. He is also termed as the *Lokapāla* whose glory is well known in the entire universe. But the prowess and glory of the earlier times is no more to be seen in Varuṇa of the *Purāṇas*. Therefore, when Hiranyākṣa reminding Varuṇa of his earlier prowess challenges him for a fight, he peacefully replies that he is now devoid of strength and as such he can go and search for another match for a combat—

स्मयन् प्रलब्धुं प्रणिपत्य नीचवत् जगाद मे देह्यधिराज संयुगम्।
त्वं लोकपालोऽधिपतिर्बृहच्छ्रवा वीर्यापहो दुर्मद वीरमानिनाम्॥
विजत्य लोकेऽखिलदैत्यदानवान् यद्राजसूयेन पुरायजत् प्रभो॥
रोषं समुत्थं शमयन् स्वया धिया व्यवोचदंगोपशमं गता वयम्।

—*Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, 3.17.27-29

In the *Udyoga Parvan* (117.9) of the *Mahābhārata*, there is a mention of the spouse of Varuṇa, who was called Devī. In chapter 129 of the *Brahma Purāṇa*, it has been brought out that the great Śani once came to Varuṇa and challenged him for a fight, but Varuṇa instead of picking up a fight with him, gave away his daughter Vāruṇī in marriage to Śani and sent him back giving his own abode also in the ocean for their residing. This Vāruṇī is also conceived to be an other form of wine or *Surā* which is liked by the gods.

In the *Śalya Parvan* (49.11-12) of the *Mahābhārata*, it has been mentioned that Varuṇa, who was fond of performing *yajñas*, once performed a great *Rājasūya yajña* as a result of which he achieved the position of *Lokapāla*.

The specific association of the horses with Varuṇa in the Vedic literature further developed in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas*. In a story repeated in both of these texts (*Mahābhārata*, *Vana Parvan*, 115.27 and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, 9.15.5-7) Satyavati, the daughter of Gādhi was desired in marriage by the sage Ṛcaka. The king Gādhi put a condition that he could marry the girl provided the sage could arrange for a thousand horses white like moon each one of them with one black ear. The sage Ṛcaka then approached Varuṇa and getting the horses with the prescribed specifications handed them over to the king and got the princess in return.

तस्य सत्यवतीं कन्याम् ऋचीकोऽयाचत द्विजः।
वरं विसदृशं मत्वा गाधिर्भार्गवमब्रवीत्॥
एकतः श्यामकर्णानां हयानां चन्द्रवर्चसाम्।
सहस्रं दीयतां शुल्कं कन्यायाः, कुशिका वयम्॥
इत्युक्तस्तन्मतं ज्ञात्वा गतः स वरुणान्तिकम्।
आनीय दत्त्वा तानश्वान् उपयेमे वराननाम्॥

—*Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (9.15.5-7)

This is evidently the developed form of the story contained in the *Śukla Yajurveda* (29.59).

Of all the *Purāṇas*, the *Matsya Purāṇa* speaks only about the physical features of Varuṇa. The details of the same are mentioned in the context of the battle between Taraka and other demons. It has been stated about Varuṇa, that he had all the oceans with him, and his body was like water only. The colour of his horses was as white as the moon. They had the speed of the wind. The body of Varuṇa was black like the gem and his body was adorned with gold ornaments. He was clad in yellow lower garment. He was surrounded by horrible serpents. He wore armlets of conch studded with gems. He appeared as deep as the ocean—

चतुर्भिः सागरैर्युक्तो लेलिहानश्चपत्रगैः।
 शंखमुक्ताङ्गदधरो बिभ्रत् तोयमयं वपुः॥
 कालपाशान् समाविध्यन् हयैः शशिकरोपमैः।
 वाय्वीरितैर्जलाकारैः कुर्वन् लीलाः सहस्रशः॥
 पाण्डुरोद्धूतवसनः प्रचलन् रुचिराङ्गदः।
 मणिश्यामोत्तमवपुः हरिभारार्पितो वरः॥
 वरुणः पाशधृङ् मध्ये देवानीकस्य तस्थिवान्।
 युद्धवेलामभिलषन् भिन्नवेल इवार्णवः॥ —*Matsya Purāṇa*, 173.12-15

5. Aryamā

Aryamā is found included as the god in the list of the twelve Ādityas. He has been mentioned at several places together with Mītra and Varuṇa—

आ नो वहीँ रिशादसो वरुणो मित्रो अर्यमा॥ —(I.26.4)

Aryamā is also stated to be connected with the Phālguni constellation—

अर्यम्णो वा एतन्नक्षत्रं यत्पूर्वं फाल्गुनी।

No separate hymn has been dedicated to Aryamā but in the context of the Ādityas, his name is found frequently mentioned. The word Aryamā stands to mean a friend, a companion or an attendant. In some contexts, his name has been connected with the family as well as the family feast—नार्यमणं पुष्यति नो सखायं कैवलाद्यो भवति केवलादी। In this passage, Aryamā is conceived to be taking food with his family. The word Aryamā also stands for a friend or मित्र—

अर्यम्यं वरुण मित्र्यं वा सखायं वा सदमिद् भ्रातरं वा॥

—*Rgveda*, V.85.3

He is considered to be the friend of maidens at the time of marriage together with Agni—

त्वर्यमा भवति यत्कनीनां नाम स्वधावन् गृह्यं विभर्षि॥ —*Ibid.*, V.3.2

Evidently, Aryamā had been an invisible god of friendship and benevolence who was later on included in the family of Ādityas. The word Aryamā is also found in the Avesta though he is spelt there a little differently. The *Brāhmaṇas* identify Aryamā only as a form of Sūrya. The

equation of Sūrya and Aryamā is spelt out in the *Taittirīya Samhitā* (2.3.4) and *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (5.3.1.2). In the following passage of *Taittirīya Samhitā* (2.3.4), Aryamā has been equated with Sūrya thrice, further emphasising that those who be diserous of the heaven, riches and welfare should adore Aryamā—

अर्यम्णे चरुं निर्वपेत् स्वर्गकामो असौ वा आदित्यो अर्यमा अर्यमणमेव स्वेन भागेन
उपधावति स एवैनं सुवर्गं लोकं गमयति। अर्यम्णे चरुं निर्वपेत् यः कामयेत
दानकामा मे प्रजाः स्युरिति असौ वा आदित्यो अर्यमा यः खलु वै ददाति सो
अर्यमा। अर्यम्णे चरुं निर्वपेत् यः खलु कामयेत स्वस्ति खलु जनतामियाम् असौ
वा आदित्यौ अर्यमा।

In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (5.3.2) it has been provided that a white cow should be given away to a Brāhmaṇa in order to please Aryamā—

.... तस्य शितिपृष्ठो गौर्दक्षिणा। एषा वा ऊर्ध्वा बृहस्पतेर्दिक्। तदेष उपरिष्टाद्
अर्यम्णः पन्थाः।

Sāyaṇa had interpreted the above passage almost identically as follows—

(ऊर्ध्वा दिक् बृहस्पतिदेवताका। तस्या उपरिष्टाद् अर्यम्णः। सूर्यस्य एषः
परिदृश्यमानः पन्था-मार्गः। स च किरणसंबन्धात् श्वेतः —सायणं)

Yask in *Nirukta* conceives Aryamā as an other form of Sūrya. In the *Purāṇas*, Aryamā has been conceived to be the leader of the manes of the dead ancestors. As Indra is said to be the Lord of the gods, similarly, Aryamā has been conceived to be the leader of the manes. In the *Bhagavadgītā* (10.29) Lord Kṛṣṇa declares that he was Aryamā among the *Pitṛs*—

पितृणामर्यमा चास्मि यमः संयमताम्यहम्॥

In the *R̥gveda* (X.14), *Śukla Yajurveda* (XIX.45) and the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (12.8.19 and 13.4.1.6), Aryamā has been declared to be the leader of the manes. There is hardly any mention of the hell in the Vedic literature but the ideology was possibly developed in the Purāṇic literature. Accordingly Aryamā became the controller of the noble souls while Yama was made to dominate the evil souls in the hell. Sometimes Aryamā was also conceived to look after the functions of Yama as well. When the sage Mandavya pronounced a curse over Yama to be born as Śūdra on earth, then Aryamā was required to perform the functions of Yama as well; for a hundred years, according to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*—

अविभ्रदर्यमा दण्डं यथावदधकारिषु।

यावद्धार शूद्रत्वं शापाद् वर्षशतं समः॥

—*Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (1.13.15)

The same text also highlights the performance of Aryamā as a calf at the time of the milking of the earth—

वत्सेन पितरोऽर्यम्णा कव्यं क्षीरमधुक्षत।

आमपात्रे महाभागा श्रद्धया श्राद्धदेवताः॥

—*Ibid.* (4.18.18)

The *Mahābhārata* (Śānti Parvan, 208.15) describes Aryamā as one of the twelve Ādityas.

6. Arīśa

Arīśa is one of the twelve Ādityas. In the *R̥gveda* his name is mentioned alongwith those of Dakṣa and Varuṇa, thus—

इमा गिर आदित्येभ्यो घृतस्तु सनाद्राजभ्योजुह्वा जहोमि।
शृणेतु मित्रो अर्यमा भगोनस्तु विजातो वरुणोदक्षो अशः॥

—*R̥gveda*, II.27.1

In the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*, Arīśa is mentioned as one of the eight sons of Aditi, the other seven being Mitra, Varuṇa, Dhātā, Aryamā, Bhaga, Indra and Vivasvān. In the *Atharvaveda*, his name appears twice. Once he is mentioned with other gods, where he has been eulogised for the redemption from sins. Here he appears also with Mitra, Bhaga and Vivasvān—

ब्रूमो राजानं वरुणं मित्रं विष्णमथो भगम्।
अंशं विवस्वन्तं ब्रूमस्ते नोमुञ्चन्त्वंहसः॥

—*Atharvaveda*, II.8.2

(We pray illustrious Varuṇa, Mitra, all pervading Viṣṇu, adorable gods Arīśa and Bhaga, besides Vivasvān, who may all free us from all the sins.)

At another place, Arīśa has been prayed for providing safety or protection from the enemy, thus—

अंशोभगो वरुण मित्रो अर्यमादिति पान्त मरुतः।
अप तस्य द्वेषोगमेदभिहुतो यावयच्छत्रुमन्तितम्॥

(Let Arīśa, Bhaga, Varuṇa, Mitra, Aryamā and Marutas protect us. The gods may protect us from the enemy, who intends to harm us. Separating that terrific enemy from us, he should be driven out.)

Therefore, Arīśa is god in the Vedas, who is invoked with other gods for freeing one from all the sins and for protection from the enemy.

7. Vivasvān

The word means to illumine and is formed from the Root वस्। The same root is also the base word and indeed the word Vivasvān stands for illustrious and as such it could naturally be associated with the sun. In Avesta, there is also a god who compares favourably with Vivasvān of the Vedic literature and as such the word Vivasvān seems to be of considerable antiquity and on reaching the stage of Vedic literature, his earlier form had gone through considerable change, incorporating therein some important human aspects.

His spouse is believed to be Saranyu who was the daughter of Tvastā. Yama was born out of her womb.

यमस्य माता पर्युह्यमाना मही जाया विवस्वतो ननाश।

—*Rgveda*, 10.17.1.

The epithet of Vaivasvata has been used for Yama in the *Rgveda* (I.14.1). In another story in the *Rgveda* (X.17.2) both the Aśvins were born out of the wife of Vivasvān who have also been called as the ancestors of Manu (*Rgveda*, VIII.52.9). In the *Atharvaveda* (VIII.10.24) and the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (13.4.3.3), the adjective of Vaivasvata has also been used for Manu and as such, Vaivasvat could be considered to be the ancestor of the entire human race. Keeping these facts in view, the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (3.1.3.4) and the *Taittirīya Samhitā* (6.5.6) consider Vivasvān to be the ancestor of the human race—

(1) स विवस्वान् आदित्यः तस्येमाः प्रजाः।

(2) ततो विवस्वान् आदित्यो अजायत तस्य वा इयं प्रजाः यन्मनुष्याः।

In the *Rgveda* (X.6.3.1) even the gods are said to have been born from Vivasvān. The association of Vaivasvata with Yama is of considerable importance and provides evidence of his being present in ancient Harappan culture as well, besides other deities.

Besides other subjects, the death of the human beings and the travel of the soul from the earth to heaven has also been variously discussed. The god of death has, therefore, been included in the list of the Vedic gods. It may also be recalled here that the theme of the travel of the soul has been found depicted over the Harappan pottery, unearthed from Harappa and the matter has been suitably discussed with the supprotive evidence in the first volume of the Indian Gods and Goddesses. Interestingly scholars like R.S. Bist, on the basis of the artefacts of the Harappan culture unearthed from Dhoulavira in Gujarat have come out with the opinion correlating the Vedic culture with the Harappan culture.

In the above background it may be stated that in case the god of death has been highlighted in the Vedas, the same god also appears in the Harappan culture and in the same context the name has also been given to the god of death in the Vedic literature. In the *Rgveda*, three Sūktas have been devoted to him. Besides these, there is another passage in the same text in which the conversation between Yama and his sister Yamī has been recorded. When Yamī-Vaivasvatī addressed Yama-Vaivasvata, then the former represented a Ṛṣi and latter (Yama-Vaivasvata) stands for Devata. According to the Sūkta—"यस्य वाक्यं स ऋषिर्षा तेनोच्यते सा देवता" both of them represent the Ṛṣis and the devatas. In the *Rgveda*, the name of Yama has been repeated atleast fifty times. He, however, receives most of the attention in the first and the tenth Maṇḍala, Vivasvata or Vivasvān has been mentioned to be his father, which earned him the title of Vaivasvata—

यम वैरूपैरिह मादयस्व।

विवस्वन्तं हुवे यः पिता तेऽस्मिन्यज्ञे बर्हिष्या निषद्य।।

—*Rgveda*, X.14.5

(O god of death, you reach the place of *yajña* with other gods and please the

performer. Your father known as Vivasvān is invoked by us in the *yajña*. Let him please us reaching over the fire-altar and taking his seat over the *kuśa*-grass).

His mother is known as Saranyu (*Ibid.*, X.17.1-2). the link of Vaivasvata is also mentioned with Varuṇa, Bṛhaspati and Agni. Since all these gods are connected with the dead to the heaven, they naturally get connected with Yama. In some contexts, Yama is also described as a king. According to the *Rgveda* (X.16.9), the dead reach the heaven and have an audience with Yama and Varuṇa. The abode of Yama is said to be located beyond distant *lokas* in the space. Out of the three *lokas*, two belong to Savitā and one is meant for Yama (*Ibid.*, X.35.9). In the *Rgveda* (X.10.4) there is a mention of a discussion between Yama and Yamī in which they have described themselves to be the progeny of water nymphs and the Gaṇḍharvas. The god-hood of Yama has also been described in the *Bṛhaddevatā*, but the adjective of Vaivats is not attached to his name. His iconographical features, however, were developed quite late though on the basis of the Harappan finds concerning him, a fairly good idea could be formed about his personality.

Yama according to J.N. Banerjea, is the guardian of the south, and is described in the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā* simply as the god of death, having a staff in his hand and riding a buffalo (*daṇḍi yama mahiṣago*). The *Viṣṇudharmottara* gives us an elaborate description of the four armed god seated over a buffalo with his consort Dhumrornā on his left lap. His right hands hold a staff and a sword and the left ones, a trident with flames and a rosary, a face with flames issuing from it being shown on the top of the staff (it might stand for *khaṭvāṅga*).

8. Bhaga

Bhaga happens to be one of the twelve Ādityas. Though in the earliest hymns of the *Rgveda*, only six of the twelve Ādityas are mentioned, still the name of Bhaga is included in the earliest list. In some contexts he is also known in the form of the *yajña*. In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (6.3.1.19), the term 'यज्ञोभग' has been used. He is also conceived to have been blinded. The *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* (2.1.2) testifies as under—

तस्य (भगस्य) चक्षु परापतत् तस्मादा हुरन्धो वै भग इति॥

Sāyaṇa has established the godhood of Bhaga as under—

भग भक्तस्य इत्येषा भग देवताका वा॥

—(1.24)

Bhaga has travelled to the period of Epics and *Purāṇas* in one or the other form. In Śaṃptika Parvan (18.1-25) of the *Mahābhārata*, the story of the destruction of the sacrifice of Dakṣa has been included, in which Rudra cut off the arms of Savitā, blinded Bhaga and broke the teeth of Puṣaṇ. The same story has been repeated in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (4.5.20-21) भगस्य नेत्रे भगवान् पातितस्य रुषा भुवि॥ and the *Brahma Purāṇa* (109.26) भगस्य चक्षुषी विप्र वीर भद्रो व्यपाटयत॥

9. Puṣaṇ

Puṣaṇ is the name of prominent god to whom some hymns are addressed exclusively, and whose praise at other times is sung in connection with that of Indra. In these hymns the character

of this deity is not very clearly defined, but he is conceived to be the one who feeds the universe. He is said to behold the entire universe; is addressed as the guide of travellers and the protector of cattle. He is called upon to protect his servants in battle, and to defend them as of old. He is invoked in the marriage ceremonies, and is asked to take the bride's hand to lead her away, and to bless her in her conjugal relations. He is said also to conduct the spirits of the departed from this world to the next. In one text he is called 'the nourisher', as Viṣṇu in later times was called 'the preserver'. By far the greater number of prayer addressed to him seem to refer to him as the guide and protector of travellers, both along the ordinary journey of life and in the longer journey to the other world; and as he is said to be constantly travelling about, he is said to know well the road by which they have to go.

The following is a specimen of the hymns addressed to Puṣaṇ in the *Ṛgveda*—"Conduct us, Puṣaṇ, over our road; remove distress, son of the deliverer; go on before us. Smite away from before us the destructive and injurious world which seeks after us. Drive away from our path the waylayer, the thief and the robber. Tread with your foot upon the burning weapons of that deceitful wretch, whoever he be. O wonder-working and wise Puṣaṇ, we desire that your help you favour our father. O god, bring all blessing, and you are distinguished by with your golden spear, make wealth easy of acquisition! Convey us past our opponents; make our paths easy to travel, gain strength for us here. Lead us over a country of rich pastures; let no new trouble (come in our) path. Bestow, satiate, grant, stimulate us; fill our belly. We do not reproach Puṣaṇ, we praise him with hymns; and we seek riches from the wonder-working god". "May we, O Puṣaṇ! meet with a wise man who will straightaway direct us and say, 'it is this'. May Puṣaṇ follow our kine; may he protect our horses; may he give us food... Come hither, glowing god, the deliverer, may we meet."

In the *Purāṇas* Puṣaṇ occupies a far less exalted position. It seems almost surprising that the god who in the Vedas held so important a position and reverently approached as the giver of good to his worshippers, described as being obliged to feed upon gruel, because his teeth have been knocked out of his mouth. The earliest form of the legend describing this event is found in the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* Rudra not being invited to a great sacrifice that Dakṣa, his father-in-law, was celebrating, shot an arrow which pierced the sacrificial victim. Puṣaṇ ate part of this victim, and it broke his teeth. In describing Dakṣa, a full account of this sacrifice is given. In the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, Puṣaṇ appears as one of the Ādityas.

Ultimately this god went into oblivion and the later texts did not remember him.

10. Savitā

Of all the solar deities in the *Ṛgveda*, Savitā is possibly the most important. The word is formed of the root √ which has a triple meaning viz., to extract juice, to aspire or influence and to give birth to. Possibly the second meaning could be more appropriate. The rising of the early sun in the morning possibly stands for the emerging of the noble ideas in one's mind, and is given the name of Savitā or Savitṛ. In the famous Gāyatrī hymn the same Savitā is invoked in order to influence the mind and actions—

तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि।
धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात्॥

—*Rgveda*, III.62.10

The excellent lustre, conceived in the above hymn of the *Rgveda*, stands for the sun or Savitā. Because of its link with the rising sun in the morning the golden colour of Savitā is too apparent. Savitā has also been conceived as follows—

- (i) हिरण्याक्ष (*Rgveda*, I.35.8)
- (ii) हिरण्यबाहु (*Ibid.*, VI.71.1)
- (iii) हिरण्यहस्त (*Ibid.*, I.35.10)
- (iv) हिरण्यपाणि (*Ibid.*, I.35.9)
- (v) हिरण्यजिह्व (*Ibid.*, VI.71.13)
- (vi) हिरण्यकेश (*Ibid.*, X.139.1)
- (vii) हिरण्यरथ (*Ibid.*, I.35.2)

The arms of Savitā have been specifically mentioned. He aspires the people by raising his hands. (प्र बाहू अस्त्राक् सविता सवीमनि निवेशयन् प्रसुवन् अक्नुभिः जगत्, 4.53.3)। It is further stated that his arms are extended covering the entire universe (II.38.2 and IV.53.4). Indeed all these references speak about the rays of the sun. The equation of the sun with Savitā is found in several of the hymns of the *Rgveda*. In one of the *Rgvedic* hymns (IV.14.2), it is mentioned that Savitā established his shine much above the earth and the sun pervades the entire universe with his lustre—

ऊर्ध्वं केतुं सविता देवो अश्रेज्योतिर्विश्वस्मै भुवनाय कृण्वन्।
आ प्रा द्यावापृथिवी अन्तरिक्षं वि सूर्यो रश्मिभिश्चेकितानः॥

In the *Rgveda* (X.158.1-4 and I.35.1-11) both Savitā and the sun have been treated to be one and the same. At some stages, Sūrya has been treated to be the *Prasavitā* of the people, who influences them in many ways—

उद्वेति प्रसविता जनानां महान् केतुरर्णवः सूर्यस्य, 7.63.2
नूनं जनाः सूर्येण प्रसूताः 7.63.4

In view, however, of the fact that both of them are adored as two separate gods in the *Rgveda*, sometimes they are invoked individually also in the texts. In this connection the following hymns of the *Rgveda* could be quoted—

- (i) I.35.9 (ii) I.123.3 (iii) V.81.4

Sometimes other solar gods like Puṣaṇ, Mitra and Bhaga too are also equated with Savitā. The following passages reflect this idea—

स नः पूषा अविता भुवद् (3.62.9), उत पूषा भवसि देव याममिः (5.81.5),
उत मित्रो भवसि देव धर्मभिः (5.81.4) सुवाति सविता भगः (5.82.3) तथा
उदुष्य देवः सविता ययाम ॥ भगो हव्यो मानुषेभिः (7.38.1)

Sāyaṇa, on the other hand, interprets that the sun before the sunrise is called Savitā and is called Sūrya from the sunrise to sunset—

उदयात् पूर्वभावी सविता। उदयास्तमयवर्ती सूर्यः।

Yask, on the other hand, is of the opinion that the sky is filled with the sunrays at the time of Savitā—

तस्य कालो यदा द्यौः अपहततमस्का आकीर्णरश्मिर्मवति।

But in some hymns of the *Rgveda* (II.38.1), Savitā has been connected with Sūrya at the time of the sunset as well. According to the same text (VI.7.9), they make the people and the animals to sleep and wake them up too. Supporting the link of Savitā with Sūrya at the time of sunset, in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (3.2.3.18), the former has been termed as Savitā of the sunset—

प्रतीचीमेव दिशम्। सवित्रा प्राजानन्नेष वै सविता य एष तपति। तस्मादेष
प्रत्यङ् एति। प्रतीची हि एतेन दिशं प्राजानन्। प्रतीची हि एतस्य दिक्।

Evidently, Savitā was initially an adjective of Sūrya which stood for the life principle of the universe but in due course of time it started having a separate entity of his own based on his importance. Gradually several other usages were attributed to Savitā in due course of time and ultimately his separate entity was totally lost.

11. Aśvins

The main function of the Aśvanikumāras in the Vedic literature has been the treatment of the ailments. They were conceived to be the physicians of the gods and enjoyed a very important position among the Vedic gods. The hymns of praise recited in their favour exceed all those recited for other gods. In the *Nighaṇṭu*, he has been placed in the category of the gods of space and in the *Rgveda*, he is sometimes connected with light as well. In the *Rgveda* (I.182.9, I.184.1, X.61.4), he has been described to have emerged in the early morning and Uṣā his sister sending them off makes way for the sun who emerges with red rays—

अप स्वसुरुषसो नग् जिहीते
रिणक्ति कृष्णीररुषाय पन्थाम्।
अश्वामघा गोमघा वां हुवेम

—*Rgveda*, VII.71.1

It is also stated in the *Rgveda*, that when the pink Uṣā peeps over the earth from a distance, both Aśvins, mounted over the chariot follow her—

दूराद् इहेव यत् सती अरुणाप्सुः अशिश्वितत्
नृवद् दक्षा मनोयुजा रथेन पृथुपाजसा। सचेथे अश्विनोषसम्॥

—*Ibid.*, VIII.51.2

Both of them have further been described as the remover of darkness (*Rgveda*, IV.39.3) and in another hymn (VIII.35.16), Aśvins are described as the destroyers of the enemies, which possibly represent darkness. In the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (1.2.15), Aśvins have been described as the god of early morning like Uṣā and Agni. In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (5.5.4.1) they have been described to be of white or red colour. The Vedic texts have also described about the body formations of Aśvins. In some of the contexts they are stated to be quite young (*Rgveda*, VII.67.10), and look quite beautiful (*Ibid.*, VI.62.5). They are also described to be of the complexion of honey which looks glorious like the gold (VII.62.5). Both the Aśvins are described to be the husbands of Sūryā who always occupies a seat in their chariot—

तदू षु वाम् अजिरं चेति यानं येन पती भवथः सूर्यायाः। —*Ibid.*, VI.43.3

In several other hymns of the *Rgveda*, there is a mention of Sūryā, the daughter of the sun to be travelling with Aśvins in their chariot—

1. आ वां रथं युवतिस्तिष्ठदत्र जुष्ट्वी नरा दुहिता सूर्यस्य। 1.118.5.

2. युवो रथं दुहिता सूर्यस्य सह श्रिया नासत्या वृणीत। 1.117.13

In another hymn of the *Rgveda*, Sūryā is said to have been won by Aśvins, who accept her gracefully and this is supported by all the gods—

आ वां रथं दुहिता सूर्यस्य कार्ष्मेवातिष्ठद् अर्वता जयन्ती।

विश्वेदेवा अन्वमन्यन्त हृद्भिः समु श्रिया नासत्या सचेथे॥

—*Ibid.*, I.116.17

Sāyaṇa has quoted a small tale in this connection according to which Sūryā intended to give away his daughter to the moon in marriage. But all the gods were desirous of possessing her. All of them then resolved that all of them should organise a race, making Sūryā as the central point and whosoever won the race was to be married to Sūryā. Aśvins ran mounted over their stead or the asses and won the race. Therefore Sūryā was given away in marriage to them—

सविता स्वदुहितरं सूर्याख्यां सोमाय राज्ञे प्रदातुमैच्छत्। तां सूर्यां सर्वे देवा
वरयामासुः। ते अन्योन्यमुचुः। आदित्यमवधिं कृत्वा आजिं धावाम। यः
अस्माकम् उज्जेष्यति तस्येयं भविष्यति इति। तत्र अश्विनौ उदजयताम्। सा च
सूर्या जितवतः तयोः रथमारुरोह। अत्र प्रजापतिर्वै सोमाय राज्ञे दुहितरं प्रायच्छत्
इति ब्राह्मणमनुसन्धेयम्।

The same story is repeated in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* and other texts in one or the other forms—

प्रजापतिर्वै सोमाय राज्ञे दुहितरं प्रायच्छत् सूर्यां सावित्रीम्। तस्यै सर्वे देवा वरा
आगच्छन्। तस्या एतत् सहस्रं वहतुमन्वाकरोत् यदेतत् आश्विनम् इति
आचक्षते तस्मिन् देवा न समजानत ममेदम् अस्तु ममेदम् अस्तु इति। ते
संजानाना अब्रुवन् आजिमस्यायामहै स यो न उज्जेष्यति तस्येद भविष्यतीति।

—*Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, IV.2.1.

In the tenth Maṇḍala of the *Ṛgveda* (Sūkta-35) Sūryā has been described as the wife of the Moon and Aśvins are stated to be the attendants of the moon—

सोमो वधूयुरभवत् अश्विनास्ताम् उभा वरा।
 सूर्या यत् पत्ये शंसन्तीं मनसा सविताददात्॥
 यदश्विना पृच्छमानौ अयातं त्रिचक्रेण वहतुं सूर्यायाः।
 विश्वेदेवा अनु तद् वामजान् पुत्रः पितरौ अवृणीत पूषा॥

With the passage of time the initial Vedic entity of Aśvins was relegated to the background and both of them became popular in the later Vedic literature, the Epics and the *Purāṇas* as the divine physicians who could not only remove body ailments or diseases, but could also perform surgical feats of incredible nature. The most surprising of such feats was the replacing of the human head of Gaṇeśa with that of an elephant as has been mentioned in several of the *Purāṇas* and the replacing of the human head of Viṣṇu with that of a horse as has been described in the *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (4.1.5.1-15) contains the story of the Sage Cyavana, which has further been developed in the *Mahābhārata* and in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in an abridged form. The story of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* seems to be more ritualistic. According to this story when the Sages named Bhārgava and Aṅgīrasa were about to depart for the heaven, they left Cyavana on earth since he possessed quite an ugly face and the body. He started roaming around the camp of the king Saryāti, whose sons spotted the sage and he was belaboured by them. Cyavana made them intoxicated and they started fighting among themselves. Then Saryāti carried his daughter Sukanyā to Cyavana and tried to assuage the hurt feelings of the sage by offering his daughter to him. Once Aśvins spotted Sukanyā and desired for her. They advised her to leave her old and ugly husband. When the desire of Aśvins was communicated by Sukanyā to her husband, the sage Cyavana, advised Sukanyā to tell Aśvins that themselves are undeveloped and unwholesome and still they denounced her husband. He further said, "In case they ask you as to how were they unwholesome, then ask them to revive the youth of my husband and only then I shall tell you". When both the Aśvins arrived again, Sukanyā spoke to them accordingly. They made the sage to take a bath in a tank by which Cyavana was turned into a young man. The sage then told Aśvins that the gods were performing a *yajña* at Kurukṣetra, by doing that they have deprived you of your share of the *yajña* taking you to be incompetent. On hearing this Aśvins went to Kurukṣetra and enquired of the gods for depriving them of their share of the *yajña*. They were informed, since you spend more time with the humans, removing their ailments, therefore you are not considered to be suitable to share the *yajña*". Aśvins then declared, "you are also performing a topless *yajña*". When the gods enquired about the reason for the same, Aśvins, after receiving their due shares made the *yajña* complete—

यत्र वै भृगवो वा अंगिरसो वा स्वर्गं लोकं समाश्नुवत तत् च्यवतो भार्गवः
 जीर्णिः कृत्यारूपो जहे। शर्यातो वा इदं मानवो ग्रामेण चचार तस्य कुमारः
 क्रीडन्त इमं जीर्णिं कृत्यारूपम् अनर्थं मन्यमाना लोष्ठैः विपिपिषुः। स

शायतिभ्यश्चुक्रोध। तेभ्यः असंज्ञां चकार। पितैव पुत्रेण युयुधे, भ्राता भ्रात्रा। शर्यातो ह वा ईक्षांचक्रे यत् 'किमकरम्, तस्मादिदमापदि' इति।.... स विदांचकार स वै च्यवन इति। स रथं युक्त्वा सुकन्यां शार्यातीम् उपाधाय प्रसिष्यन्द 'ऋषे नमस्ते। यत्रावेदिषम् तेन अहिंसिषम्। इयं सुकन्यां तया ते अपह्वे'।

.... अश्विनौ ह वा इदं भिषज्यन्तौ चेरतुः। तौ सुकन्याम् उपेयतुः। तस्यां मिथुनमीषाते। तौ होचतुः 'सुकन्यै कमिमं जीणिं कृत्यारूपम् उपशेषे? आवाम् अनुप्रेहि' इति। सा होवाच 'यस्मै मां पिता अदात् नैवाहं तं जीवन्तं हास्यामि' इति। तद् ह अयम् ऋषिः आजज्ञौ। स होवाच सुकन्ये यदि त्वेतत् पुनर्ब्रूवतः सा त्वं ब्रूतात् 'न वै सुसर्वो इव स्थ न सुसमृद्धौ इव। अथ मे पतिं निन्दथः'। तौ यदि त्वा ब्रूवतः 'केन आवाम् असर्वो स्वः केन असमृद्धौ इति'? सा त्वं ब्रूतात् 'पतिं मे पुनर्युवाणं कुरुतम् अथ वां वक्ष्यामीति'....।

तौ होचतुः एतं हृदमभ्यवहर। स येन वयसा कमिष्यते तेनोदैष्यतीति तौ ह ऋषिरेव प्रत्युवाच—कुरुक्षेत्रे अमो देवा यज्ञं तन्वते ते वां यज्ञादन्तर्यन्ति तौ ह तत एव प्रेयतुः 'उप नौ ह्वयध्वमिति'। नेह देवा ऊचुः 'न वाम् उपह्वयिष्यामहे। बहु मनुष्येषु संसृष्टमचारिष्टं भिषज्यन्तौ' इति।

तौ होचतुः 'विशीर्ष्णां वै यज्ञेन यजध्व' इति। 'कथं विशीर्ष्णीति?' 'उप नौ ह्वयध्वम् अथ वो वक्ष्यावः' इति। ताम्यामेतम् आश्विनं ग्रहमगृह्णन्।.... तौ एतद्यज्ञस्य शिरः प्रत्यधत्तम्।।

—*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 4.1.5.1-15

The above story projects two aspects of the conduct of Aśvins. In the first place, they remove the old age of Cyavana. This feat of Aśvins is also found mentioned in the *R̥gveda* in one or other forms. In the second part, these Aśvins complete the headless *yajña* which is entirely a ritualistic aspect. In the *Somayaga*, Viṣṇu is stated to have been associated with a ritual named *pravargya*. Because of its highly ritualistic performance, it is also termed as the head of the *yajña*. Till such time gods were ignorant about it, their *yajña* was considered to be incomplete.

The sage Dadhīci was of course well aware of the ritual of *pravargya* which was also called *Madhu-Vidyā*. When Aśvins came to realise that the sage Dadhīci was fully aware of this divine knowledge they went to him and prayed to him to impart the knowledge of the same to them (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 14.1.1.18). Indra on his part cautioned the sage against the parting of the divine knowledge to Aśvins and in case the sage acted otherwise, his head was likely to be severed (*Ibid.*, 14.1.1.19). When Aśvins came to know of Indra's threat, they cut off the head of a horse and fixed it over the trunk of the sage Dadhīci, whose head they had already cut off and kept in safety. They of course received the divine knowledge from the sage. But Indra came to know of Dadhīci's imparting the knowledge to Aśvins, he cutt off the horse head of the sage but Aśvins brought back the original head of the sage and fixed over the body of Dadhīci with the application of the divine knowledge received by them.

The same story of the restoring of the horse head of Dadhīci by Aśvins has also been repeated besides the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (2.15.16-18)—

ददं वै तन्मधु दध्यङ् अथर्वणो अश्विभ्याधवाच तदैतद् ऋषिः
पश्यन्नवोचद् आथर्वणाय अश्विना दधीचे अश्व्यं शिरः प्रत्यैरयतम्॥

The second part of the story is also found in the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* (6.4.9.1) and *Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā* (4.6.1.2), besides *Kaṭhaka Saṃhitā* (27.4.5) in a somewhat modified form—

यज्ञस्य शिरः अच्छिद्यत्। ते देवा अश्विनौ तब्रुवन् 'भिषजौ वै स्थः। इदं
यज्ञस्य शिरः प्रत्यधत्तम्' इति। तौ अब्रूताम् 'वरं वृणावहे। ग्रहा एव नौ अत्रापि
गृह्यताम्' इति। ताभ्यामेतम् आश्विनम् अगृह्णन्। ततो वै तौ यज्ञस्य शिरः
प्रत्यधत्तम् तौ देवा अब्रुवन् 'अपूतौ वै इमौ मनुष्यचरौ भिषजौ' इति अपूतौ
ह एष अमेध्यो यो भिषक्। तौ बहिष्पवमानेन पावयित्वा ताभ्यामेतमाश्विनमगृह्णन्।

—*Taittirīya Saṃhitā*, 6.4.9.1

The story continues in the *Mahābhārata*, but the second part of the story relating to the ritualistic practices has almost disappeared. In the Vana Parvan of the *Mahābhārata* (Chapters 123-124) the story of the sage Cyavana has been retold. The sage is said to have performed a great *tapas* over the bank of the Pyoṣṇī river, for a long time. The *tapas* is so severe and hard that the thick layer of dust accumulates over his body over which the plants started growing. Once the king Saryāti together with his four wives and daughter Sukanyā arrived over that river bank. His daughter while playing with her friends went to the sage and found two shining eyes in an earth mound. In anxiety she pierces a thorn in the eyes of the sage unmindfully. The enraged sage stops stools and urination of the soldiers of the royal army. When the king comes to know of the reality about the sage, he reaches before the sage with his daughter named Sukanyā, Cyavana desires for Sukanyā and the king has to oblige the sage. Once Aśvinikumāras have a glance at Sukanyā and fall for her beauty. They advise her to marry either of them discarding the sage Cyavana. But Sukanyā does not agree. Pleased with the chastity of Sukanyā, Aśvinikumāras make her husband to regain youth after getting a bath in a stream. Then all the three of them appear before her with exactly similar form and ask Sukanyā to select her husband. Sukanyā correctly does so.

The obliged sage Cyavana then entitles Aśvinikumāras to receive the due share of the *yajña*. For this purpose he asks his father-in-law, the king Saryāti to organise a *yajña* and manage in such a way that Aśvinikumāras receive their due share at the *yajña*.

In the *Śrīmadbhāgavata Purāṇa* (9.2.1-26), the same story has been repeated with minor deviations. According to this story Aśvinikumāras once visit the place of the sage Cyavana who requests them to make him regain his youth and in return he promised them to make them entitled for the drinking of the *Soma* juice. In this case Aśvins do not express the desire for Sukanyā, when the king Saryāti reaches the cottage of his son-in-law, he finds a youth with Sukanyā instead of an old sage and his reaction has been expressed in the following verses—

चिकीर्षितं तै किमिदं, पतिस्त्वया प्रलम्बितो लोकनमस्कृतो मुनिः।
 यत् त्वं जराग्रस्तमसत्यसम्मतं विहाय जारं भजसेऽमुमध्वगम्॥
 कथं मतिस्तेऽवगतान्यथा सतां कुलप्रसूते कुलदूषणं त्विदम्॥
 विभर्षिं जारं यदपत्रपा कुलं पितृश्च भर्तृश्च नयस्यधस्तमः॥

In some of the *Brāhmaṇa* texts as well as the *Samhitās* of the *Kṛṣṇa-yajurveda* only the drinking of *Soma* has been allowed to Aśvins and nothing else. As for example, it has been mentioned in the *Taittiriya Samhitā* (2.1.10) that a Brāhmaṇa becomes desirous of drinking *Soma*, in spite of his being a degraded one. Such a Brāhmaṇa should adore Aśvinikumāras who achieved this privilege, though he was initially not entitled for the same.

आश्विनम् आलभेत यो दुर्ब्राह्मणः सोमं पिपासेत्। अश्विनौ वै
 देवानामसोमपौ आस्ताम्। तौ पश्चात् सोमपीथं प्राप्नुताम्।

There is hardly any difference in the forms of Aśvins in the *Gṛhya Sūtras* as compared to the one described in the Vedic literature. He is invoked in these texts for bestowing intelligence. The *Parashara Gṛhya Sūtra* (1.6.19) is quite vocal on the point. In the *Gobhila Gṛhya Sūtra* (2.10.26) the teacher holds the hand of the pupil during the *yajñopavīta* ceremony saying—

देवस्य त्वा सवितुः प्रसवे अश्विनोर्बाहुभ्यां गृह्णामि।

In the *Hiraṇyakesi Gṛhya Sūtra* (1.7.25) Aśvins are invoked to protect the breasts of the bride. Aśvins are also invoked at the conception of the women.

In the *Mahābhārata* (Ādi Parvan, 66.35 and Anuśāsana Parvan, 150.18), Aśvins have been known by the names of Nasatyā and Dasrā. But in the *Rgveda* (V.78.1), the words Nasatyā and Dasrā have been used collectively for both of them as could be seen from the following passages—

ता वल्नू दस्ना पुरुषाकतमा (*Rgveda*, VI.62.5)
 अश्विनावेह गच्छतम् नासत्या मा विवेनतम् (*Rgveda*, V.78.1)

There is an important hymn in the *Rgveda* as well as the *Atharvaveda*, which points to the birth of Aśvins from Saranyu—

अपागूहन् अमृतां मर्त्येभ्यः कृत्वी सवर्णाम् अददुः विवस्वते।
 उत अश्विनौ अभर्दु यत् तदासीत् अजहात् उ द्वा मिथुना सरण्युः॥

—*Atharvaveda*, 18.1.53

(The dowry given by Traṣṭā to his daughter was pervaded in the entire universe. After the marriage, the mother of Yama and the wife of Vivasvān was lost.)

Both of the above passages are not quite clear but the seers of the later age created one interesting story from the same which moves round Saranyu, the wife of Vivasvān and his son Yama, the daughter Yamī, Savarvā and Aśvins. The same story is repeated in *Nirukta* by Yask (12.10)—

तत्रेतिहासमाचक्षते। त्वाष्ट्री सरण्यूर्विवस्वत आदित्यात् यमौ मिथुनौ
जनयांचकार। सा सवर्णामन्यां प्रतिनिधाय आश्व रूपं कृत्वा प्रदुद्राव। स
विवस्वानादित्यः आश्वमेव रूपं कृत्वा तामनुसृत्य संबभूव। ततः अश्विनौ जज्ञाते
सवर्णायां मनुः।

After Yask the same story was repeated in *Bṛhaddevatā* which is reproduced as under—

अभवन् मिथुनं त्वष्टुः सरण्यूस्त्रिशिरा सह।
स वै सरण्यूं प्रायच्छत् स्वयमेव विवस्वते॥६.१६२॥
ततः सरण्यूं जज्ञाते यमयम्यौ विवस्वतः॥१६३॥
सृष्ट्वा भर्तुः परोक्षं तु सरण्यूः सदृशीं स्त्रियम्।
निक्षिप्य मिथुनं तस्याम् अश्वा भूत्वापचक्रमे॥१७.१॥
अविज्ञानाद् विवस्वांस्तु तस्यामजनयत् मनुम्॥१८॥
स विज्ञाय त्वपक्रान्तां सरण्यूमश्वरूपिणीम्।
त्वाष्ट्रीं प्रति जगामाशु वाजी भूत्वा सलक्षणः॥१९॥
सरण्यूश्च विवस्वन्तं विदित्वा हयरूपिणम्।
मैथुनायोपचक्राम तां च तत्रारुरोह सः॥२०॥
ततस्तयोस्तु वेगेन शुक्रं तदपतद् भुवि।
उपाजिघ्रच्च सा त्वश्वा तच्छुक्रं गर्भकाम्यया॥२१॥
आघ्रातमात्राच्छुक्रात् कुमारौ संबभूवतुः।
नासत्यश्चैव दस्रश्च यौ स्तुतावाश्वनाविति॥२२॥

The last verse brings out the fact that with the smelling of the semen of Vivasvān, Aśvins were born of Saranyu. This idea seems to have developed because of the usage of the epithet of *Nāsatyā*, and the word is also said to be associated birth *Nāsā*. The same ideology was further developed in the *Purāṇas* in which it has been conceived that Saranyu emitted the semen of Sūrya through her nose and Aśvins were therefore born who were given the name of *Nāsatyā* because of their having been born out of the nose.

नासापुटाभ्यामुत्सृष्टं परोऽयमिति शक्या।

तद्रे सस्ततौ जातो अश्विनाविति विशिचतम्॥

.... नासत्यौ नासिकाग्रतः॥

—*Matsya Purāṇa*, 11.36-37

The story of the birth of Aśvins has been narrated in detail in the Ādi-parvan and Anuśāsana-parvan of the *Mahābhārata*, *Matsya Purāṇa* (11.1-41), *Vāyu Purāṇa* (Ch. 84), *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (3.2.2-7) and chapter-89 of the *Brahma Purāṇa*. The text of the *Bṛhaddevatā* is quite silent about the leaving of Saranyu, the abode of Vivasvān, but the *Purāṇas* speak out on the subject quite often. It has been pointed out in the *Purāṇas* that Saranyu was unable to bear the lustre of Vivasvān as a result of which, she, leaving her shadow or Savarṇā in her place, left Vivasvān. The relevant verses of the *Matsya Purāṇa* are reproduced below—

ततस्तेजोमयरूपम् असहन्तं विवस्वतः।
 नारीमुत्पादयामास स्वशरीराद् निन्दिताम्॥
 छाये त्वं भज सरतारमस्मदीयं वशनने।
 अपत्यानि मदीयानि मातृस्वेहेन पालय॥ —Matsya Purāṇa, 11.5-6.

Thereafter Tvasṭā erased the lustre of Vivasvān in order to reduce it, reducing its size by cutting it suitably—

यन्त्रारूढं च मां कृत्वा छिन्धि तैजांस्यनेकशः। ब्रह्म 89.41
 अपनेष्यामि ते तेजो यन्त्रे कृत्वा दिवाकर।
 रूपं तव करिष्यामि लोकानन्दकरं प्रभो॥ मत्स्य. 11.27-28

In the *Rgveda* Uṣā appears as a beautiful maiden and the *Purāṇas* bring out the fact that the following by Vivasvān is indicative of Sūrya following Uṣā.

धावन्तीं तां प्रियामश्वाम् अश्वरूपधरः स्वयम्।
 पर्यधावद्, यतो याति उषा भानुस्तस्ततः॥ —Brahma Purāṇa, 89.28

Indeed the personalities of Aśvins have been baffling from the earliest times and are shrouded in ambiguity. Yask has, therefore, described the form of Aśvins variously. He also conceives that Dyāvā-Pṛthivī, the sun and the moon, days and nights also represent Aśvins.

अथातो द्युस्थाना देवताः। तासामश्विनौ प्रथमागामिनौ भवतः।
 अश्विनौ यद् व्यशनुवाते सर्वं रसेन अन्यो ज्योतिषा अन्यः।
 अश्विभिरश्विनौ इत्यौर्णवाभः।
 तत् कौ अश्विनौ? द्यावापृथिव्यौ इत्येके अहोरात्रौ इत्येके। सूर्या चन्द्रमासौ
 इत्येके। राजानौ पुण्यकृतौ इति ऐतिहासिकाः। तयोः कालः ऊर्ध्वरात्रात्
 प्रकाशीभावस्य अनुविष्टम्भम् अनु। तयोर्मार्गो हि मध्यमो ज्योतिर्मार्गः आदित्यः।
 इमे वै द्यावापृथिवी प्रत्यक्षमश्विनौ। इमे हीदं सर्वमाशनुवाताम् पुष्करस्रजौ
 इति। अग्निरेव अस्यै (पृथिव्याः) पुष्करम् आदित्यो अमुष्यै (दिवः)।

Indeed the personality of Aśvins has been variously described by different texts and it would be impossible therefore to draw any definite conclusions. Possibly Aśvins are associated with such a type of natural sights which are visible during the mornings as well as the evenings. The story of Vivasvān and Saranyu clearly points towards the same. Some of the scholars also point to their being an admixture of light and shade. Even this idea does not clearly project the true personality of Aśvins. Evidently even the Vedic seers do not appear to be sure of their true personality since both of them were the gods of most ancient times.

12. Parjanya

There are a few hymns addressed to this deity in the *Rgveda*; but from the character and functions ascribed to him, it is difficult to see wherein he differs from Indra. Professor Roth says,

"Taking a review of the whole, we find that Parjanya is a god who presides over the lightning, the thunder, the rain, and the procreation of plants and living creatures. But it is by no means clear whether he is originally a god of the rain, or a god of the thunder". In another essay he says, "Parjanya is the god of the thunderstorms and rain, the generator and nourisher of plants and living creatures. Seeing that the hymns addressed to this deity are so very similar to those sung to Indra, may not Parjanya (whose name signifies one acting for another) be merely another name for Indra?" In these hymns are the following passages, all of which are in perfect harmony with those in honour of Indra—"Laud Parjanya, worship him with reverence; —the procreative and stimulating fructifier... He splits the trees; he destroys the *Rākṣasas* (cloud demons who withhold the rains). The whole creation is afraid of his mighty stroke; even the innocent man flees before the vigorous god, when Prajanya thundering smites the evildoers. Like a charioteer urging forward his horses with a whip, the god brings into view his showery scouts. From afar, the lion's roarings arise when Parjanya charges the clouds with rain. The winds blow, the lightnings fall, the plants shoot up, the heaven fructifies; food is produced for all created things when Parjanya, thundering, replenishes the earth with moisture. Raise aloft thy vast water-vessel, and pour down showers; let the discharged rivulets role on forward, moisten the heaven and earth with fatness; let there be well-filled drinking-places for the cows."

In all this there is not a single idea that was not expressed in the hymns to Indra. In the *Purāṇas*, Indra is generally styled the king of the gods; whilst Parjanya is spoken of as the ruler and as dwelling in the clouds.

13. Tvaṣṭā or Viśvakarmā

Tvaṣṭā or as he is called in the later works, Viśvakarmā, is the architect and workman of the gods. The heavenly palaces were formed by him, and the warlike gods are indebted to him for their wonder-working weapons. He sharpens the iron axe of Brahmanaspati (Agni), and forges the thunderbolts of Indra. He is more intimately associated with men; he forms husband and wife for each other from the womb, and blesses the married couple with offspring. This accounts for the fact that the wives of the gods are his most constant companions. He made the world and all that is in it; and he is the protector of the creatures he has made. He shares with the other gods in the sacrifices offered by mortals.

Tvaṣṭā is in several passages connected with the Ṛbhus. These were sons of a man named Sudhanvan; who, owing to their great skill in working, obtained immortality and divine honours. The Ṛbhus made Indra's chariot and horses; also by their great austerities restored their parents to youth. They are spoken of as the pupils of Tvaṣṭā. It was through their making into four a single sacrificial cup that Tvaṣṭā had made, that they became divine. This exhibition of skill was made at the command of the gods, and exaltation to deity was the promised reward. Tvaṣṭā was very angry at their succes; and, ashamed of being seen, hid himself amongst the women. It is said that he even tried to slay his pupils. According to other accounts, he admired their skill and was pleased at its result. Tvaṣṭā was the father-in-law of Vivasvat (the Sun).

Indra is occasionally described as being in a state of hostility towards Tvaṣṭā and his Viśvarūpa, and ultimately caused the death of both. This Viśvarūpa had three heads, called respectively, the *Soma*-drinker, the Wine-drinker, and the Food-eater. He declared in public on one occasion, that the sacrifices should be shared by the gods only; but in private he said the Asuras (demons) should share them too. And as it is customary only to keep promises that are privately made, Indra was afraid that the Asuras, obtaining a share of the sacrifices, would be so strengthened by them as to be able to overthrow his kingdom; he therefore cut off the heads of Viśvarūpa with his thunderbolt. The three heads were turned into birds—the *Soma*-drinker became a *Kapinjala* (a Francoline partridge), for *Soma* was of a brown colour; the Wine-drinker became a *Kalavinka* (Sparrow), because when men are intoxicated they make a noise like a sparrow—the Food-eater became a *Tittiri* (partridge), which consequently has a great variety of colour, for its body appears to be sprinkled with *ghee* and honey. Tvaṣṭā was enraged because Indra had slain his son, made a libation to the gods, but did not invite Indra to partake of it. Indra, noticing this slight, took by force the vessel containing the *Soma* juice, and drank it. But he took more than was good for him. Tvaṣṭā, being angry, broke off the sacrifice, and used the few drops of *Soma* left to give effect to a curse. He employed the right formula to accomplish the death of Indra, but unfortunately laid stress upon the wrong word. He said, “Thou of whom Indra is the enemy, flourish”. As he used the words accented so as to produce this sense, Indra slew him. Had he said, “Flourish, enemy of Indra”, he would have slain Indra, instead of being slain by him.

In the *Purāṇas*, Tvaṣṭā appears under the name of Viśvakarmā. In the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* he is styled as “the author of a thousand arts, the mechanist of the gods, the fabricator of all ornaments, the chief of artists, the constructor of the self-moving chariots of the deities, by whose skill men obtain subsistence. Though not named as an Āditya in the Vedas, he is generally reckoned as one in the *Purāṇas*. In other places he is called a son of Brahmā. In art he is represented as a white man with three eyes. In his right hand he carries a club. He wears a crown, and is adorned with a necklace and bracelets of gold. He is worshipped once, twice, thrice, or four times each year, according to the devotion of his worshippers. Nowadays, no images of this deity are set up; each man worships the implements of his trade, as the representatives of Viśvakarmā. The carpenter bows down to his hammer, saw, etc., the bricklayer to his trowel; the peasant to his plough; the student to his books; the clerk to his pen. When the worship is over, the day is spent in feasting and enjoyment.

Composite

14. Mitra-Varuṇa

This composite deity is mentioned in the *R̥gveda* and invoked for the drinking of the *Soma* juice. Both of them have been described as the ones possessing immense strength.

मित्रं वयं हवामहे वरुणं सोम पीतये।

जज्ञाना पूतदक्षसा।।

—*R̥gveda*, I.23.4

(The most sacred and valorous Mitra-Varuṇa, who appear at the sacrifice for consuming *Soma* juice; we invoke them.)

This twin deity has also been described as the follower of the path of righteousness, the one who encourages always and is illustrious. The deity is also invoked for protection (*Ṛgveda*, I.23.6).

Both of them are treated to be the twin gods. In the *Ṛgveda* nearly twenty-five Sūktas are dedicated to both of them while individually Varuṇa has been invoked only in twelve and Mitra in one Sūkta only. Possibly both the gods have the same origin. Indeed with the combination of Mitra with Varuṇa, the individuality of the former has been completely lost and both the gods are known for the similar types of qualities. In the Brāhmaṇa texts the functions of both of them have been somewhat separated. If Varuṇa is Brahman the Varuṇa is *kṣatra*. One is a thinker and the other is the executor—

क्रतूदक्षौ ह वा अस्य मित्रावरुणौ। एतत् नु अध्यात्मम्। स यदेव मनसा कामयते
इदं मे स्यात् इदं कुर्वीय इति स एव क्रतुः। अथ यदस्मै तत् समृध्यते तत्
दक्षः। मित्र एव क्रतुः वरुणो दक्षः। ब्रह्मैव मित्रः क्षत्रं वरुणः। अभिगन्ता एव
मित्रः कर्ता क्षत्रियः।
—*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 4.1.4.1

In the same text, Varuṇa has been associated with the moon and Mitra with the sun. Accordingly the bright fortnight represents Varuṇa and the dark fortnight represents Mitra. On the moonless night, Varuṇa (moon) and Mitra (the sun) unite. Thereafter Mitra implants his *tejas* in Varuṇa—

अर्धतावेवार्धमासौ मित्रावरुणौ। य एवापूर्यते स वरुणः। यः अपक्षीयते स मित्रः।
तावेतां रात्रिं (अमावास्यां) उभौ समागच्छतः। तद्वा एतां रात्रिं मित्रो वरुणे रेतः
सिंचति।
—*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 2.4.4.18-19

Sāyaṇa, the great commentator has observed on the subject as follows—

य एवार्धमासः समन्तात् वर्धमानया चन्द्रकलया पूर्णो भवति स अमृतरससंबन्धाद्
वरुणः। स हि रसाभिमानो देवः। यः अर्धमासः क्षीयमाणचन्द्रकलायुक्तो भवति
स अपरपक्षः मित्रः। तौ चन्द्रसूर्यात्मकौ मित्रावरुणौ उभौ एतां दशरात्रिं सह
समाप्नुतः।

In the *Vājasneyī Samhitā*, Uṣās has been described to be moving between Mitra and Varuṇa—

अन्तरा मित्रावरुणा चरन्ती मुखं यज्ञानामपि संविदाने उषासा ॥१॥

—*Vājasneyī Samhitā*, 29.6

Mitra and Varuṇa are also found in the *Mahābhārata* (Śalya-parvan 54.14). In this epic the sages Agastya and Vasiṣṭha are said to have been born of them. In the Uttara-kāṇḍa (56.13-24) of the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Matsya Purāṇa* (61.27-31), the same story about Mitra-Varuṇa is also available. It is recorded therein that once Varuṇa summoned Urvaśī to enjoy the

conjugal pleasures with her but she told him that she had already been invited by Mitra on that date. Therefore she would not be able to oblige him. She, however, assured him that her heart was with him. When Mitra came to know of this he cursed her to be born on earth as the wife of Pururavā. since both Mitra and Varuṇa had become quite passionate, they dropped their semen in a pitcher out of which Agastya and Vasiṣṭha were born—

ततः कामयमानेन मित्रेणाहूय सोर्वशी।
 उक्ता मां रमयस्वेति बाढमित्यब्रवीच्च सा॥
 गच्छन्ती चाम्बरं तद्वत् स्तोकमिन्दीवरेक्षणा।
 वरुणेन धृता पश्चात् वरुणं नाभ्यनन्दत।
 मित्रेणाहं वृता पूर्वमय भार्या न ते प्रभो॥
 उवाच वरुणश्चित्तं मयि संन्यस्य गम्यताम्।
 गतायां बाढमित्युक्त्वा मित्रः शापमदात् तदा॥
 तस्यै, मानुषलोके त्वं गच्छ सोमसुतात्मजम्।
 भजस्वेति यतो वेश्याधर्म एष त्वया कृतः॥
 जलकुम्भे ततो वीर्यं मित्रेण वरुणेन च।
 प्रक्षिप्तमथ संजातौ द्वावेव मुनिसत्तमौ।

—*Matsya Purāṇa*, 61.27.31

In the Uttara-kāṇḍa (56.13) of the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, both Mitra and Varuṇa have been completely separated. It is stated therein that in the absence of Varuṇa, Mitra was entrusted to look after his duties—

तमेव कालं मित्रोऽपि वरुणत्वमकारयत्।
 क्षीरोदेन सहोपेतः पूज्यमानः सुरोत्तमैः।

These two deities are adored individually as well as collectively. They are most frequently named together in the hymns; Varuṇa is often addressed alone, but Mitra very seldom. The idea of the older commentators was that Mitra represented and ruled over the day, whilst Varuṇa was ruler of the night. "Varuṇa is sometimes visible to the gaze of his worshippers; he dwells in a house having a thousand doors, so that he is ever accessible to men. He is said to have good eyesight, for he knows what goes on in the hearts of men. He is the king of gods, and men; is mighty and terrible; none can resist his authority. He is sovereign ruler of the universe". "It is he who makes the sun to shine in heaven; the winds that blow are but his breath; he has hollowed out the channels of the rivers which flow at his command, and he has made the depths of the sea. His ordinances are fixed and unassailable; through their operation the moon walks in brightness, and the stars, which appear in the nightly sky, vanish in daylight. The birds flying in the air, the rivers in their sleepless flow, cannot attain a knowledge of his power and wrath. But he knows the flight of the birds in the sky, the course of the far travelling wind, the paths of ships on the ocean, and beholds all the secret things that have been or shall be done. He witnesses men's truth and falsehood."

Professor Roth says about him, "there is no hymn in the whole Vedic literature which expresses the divine omniscience in such forcible terms"; and certainly it would not be an easy task to find in any literature a passage to surpass it in this respect.

The affairs of men are under his control; he is asked to prolong life, to punish transgressors; and a hope is held out that the righteous shall see him reigning in the next world in conjunction with Yama, the ruler of the spirit-world. Varuṇa in fact has attributes and functions ascribed to him in the Vedas, of a higher moral character than any other of the gods; and therefore men call upon him for pardon and purity. "Release us", they say, "from the sins of our fathers, and from those which we have committed in our own persons". And again; "Be gracious, O mighty god, be gracious. I have sinned through want of power; be gracious".

In the hymns addressed to Mitra and Varuṇa together almost the same terms are employed as and when Varuṇa is addressed alone. Both are spoken of as righteous, and as the promoters of religion. They are said to avenge sin and falsehood.

In the Vedic literature, though Varuṇa is not regarded chiefly as the god of the ocean, as he is in the later writings, but rather, as the above hymns show, as one of the gods of light, yet there are passages which describe him as being connected with the waters of the atmosphere and on the earth, which afford some foundation for the later conceptions of his kingdom. Thus, for instance, we read, "May the waters which are celestial, and those which flow, those for which channels are dug, and those which are self-produced; those which are proceeding to the ocean, and are bright and purifying, preserve me! May those (waters) in the midst of which King Varuṇa goes... preserve me!" In other places he is said to dwell in the waters as Soma does in the woods. Professor Roth gives a probable explanation as to the manner in which Varuṇa, who was originally the god of the heavens, came to be regarded as the god of the ocean. He says—"When, on the one hand, the conception of Varuṇa as the all-embracing heaven had been established, and, on the other hand, the observation of the rivers flowing towards the ends of the earth and to the sea had led to the conjecture that there existed an ocean enclosing the earth in its bosoms, then the way was thoroughly prepared for connecting Varuṇa with the ocean".

In the *Brāhmaṇas* of the *R̥gveda* is an interesting legend showing that probably human sacrifices were at one time offered to Varuṇa. A certain king named Hariścandra had no son. Being greatly distressed on this account, as a son is necessary to the due performance of the funeral ceremonies, the king, acting upon the advice of Nārada the sage, went to Varuṇa, with a prayer. Varuṇa heard the prayer, and granted a son. When the boy grew up, his father told him of the vow he had made; but unfortunately the son was not willing to be sacrificed, and left his home. Varuṇa, not being at all pleased at the non-fulfilment of the king's vow, afflicted him with dropsy. For six years the boy wandered in the forest; at length, happening to meet with a poor Brāhmaṇa with his three sons, the prince proposed to purchase one of them to offer to the god as a substitute for himself. The father could not give up his first born, the mother would not yield her youngest; the middle one was therefore, taken. The prince then returned home taking with him the Brāhmaṇa's son. At first the king was delighted at the prospect of being able to keep his promise to the deity; but a difficulty now arose as to who would slay the boy. After some

time, on the consideration of a large present being made to him, the boy's father consented to do this. The boy was bound, the father was ready to strike, when the boy asked permission to recite some texts in praise of the gods. Of course this was granted; and as a result the deities thus lauded were so pleased with the boy's piety, that they interceded with Varuṇa to spare him. Varuṇa granted their request, and made the boy to live, and Hariścandra recovered from his sickness.

In the *Purāṇas*, Varuṇa is described as the god of the ocean. After a great conflict between the powers of heaven and earth, when order was again restored, the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* records the position assigned to the various deities. In that account Varuṇa is said to rule over the waters. In the same *Purāṇa*, it is brought out that an old Brāhmaṇa named Ṛcikā was most anxious to obtain in marriage a daughter of king Gādhi, who was really an incarnation of Indra. Gādhi refused to give his daughter to Ṛcikā except on one condition; that he would present him with a thousand horses, each having one white ear. Horses of this colour were special favourites of Indra; all horses sacrificed to him having this peculiarity. The Brāhmaṇa is said to have propitiated Varuṇa, the god of the ocean, who gave him the thousand steeds, by means of which he was able to obtain the princess in marriage.

Varuṇa is represented in pictures as a white man sitting upon a fabulous marine monster called a *makara*. This animal has the head and legs of an antelope, and the body and tail of a fish. In his right hand he carries a noose. He is worshipped in seasons of drought, and by fishermen as they cast their nets, but nowadays no images of him are made.

The following legend is found in the *Padma Purāṇa*. On one occasion Rāvaṇa was travelling to his home in Laṅkā carrying with him a stone *liṅga*, the emblem of Śiva. He was desirous of setting up the worship of Śiva there, and was taking this image from the Himālayas for that purpose. But the gods, fearing he would grow too powerful through his devotion to Śiva, wished to frustrate his purpose. Śiva in giving this stone to Rāvaṇa made him promise that wherever it first touched the ground, after leaving Śiva's abode, it should there remain. Aware of this fact, the gods tried to induce him to rest it upon the earth before he reached Laṅkā. At last it was agreed that Varuṇa should enter Rāvaṇa's body, so that, in attempting to free himself from him, he might be compelled to loose his hold of the *liṅga*. Accordingly Varuṇa entered Rāvaṇa, and caused him such intense pain that he could scarcely bear it. When he was thus suffering, Indra, in the form of an old Brāhmaṇa, passed by, and offered to take hold of the stone. No sooner did Rāvaṇa entrust it to him, than he let it fall to the ground. It is said that it sank through the earth, the top of it being visible at Baidyanātha in Birbhum to this day. The river Khursu is said to have taken its rise from Varuṇa when he left Rāvaṇa at this place; and as a result, the Hindus will not drink its water.

Although Varuṇa is described in the Vedas as a holy being, according to the teaching of the *Purāṇas*, his heaven is a place of sensual delights. He sits with his queen Vāruṇī on a throne of diamonds; *Samudra* (the sea), Gaṅgā and the gods and goddesses of different rivers, lakes, springs, etc., form his court. And stories are told of conduct the very opposite of what would be expected in one who once was addressed in such language as is addressed to him in the Vedic

hymns. He is said, conjointly with Sūrya, to have been enamoured of Urvaśī, a nymph of Indra's heaven, by whom they had a son named Agastya, one of the most eminent of ascetics.

Varuṇa is also as Pracetas, the wise; Jalapati, the lord of water; Yadapati, the lord of aquatic animals; Amburāja, the king of waters; Paśu, the noose-carrier.

15. Sūrya

Sūrya and Sāvitr are two names by which the Sun is addressed in the Vedic hymns. Sometimes the one name is used exclusively, sometimes they are used interchangeably, and sometimes they are used as though they represented quite distinct objects. It is supposed that Sāvitr refers to the sun when invisible; whilst Sūrya refers to him when he is visible to the worshippers. This at any rate gives some reason for the two names being employed, though it may not explain the case satisfactorily in every instance.

Although the hymns in which Sūrya is addressed are not very numerous, his worship was most common in the olden times, and has continued to the present day. It is to him that the Gāyatrī, the most sacred text of the Vedas, is addressed at his rising by every devout Brāhmaṇa. The hymn of Gāyatrī is simple in phraseology and is supposed to exert magical powers.

As a specimen of the language employed in some of the later writings in reference to this verse, the following few lines from the *Skanda Purāṇa* are quite relevant—"Nothing in the Vedas is superior to the Gāyatrī. No invocation is equal to the Gāyatrī, as no city is equal to Kāśī (Vārāṇasī). The Gāyatrī is the mother of the Vedas, and of Brāhmaṇas. By repeating it, a man is saved. By the power of the Gāyatrī the Kṣatriya (warrior caste) Viśvāmitra became a Brahmarṣi (Brāhmaṇa saint), and even obtained such power as to be able to create a new world. What is there indeed that can not be effected by the Gāyatrī? For the Gāyatrī is Viṣṇu, Brahmā and Śiva and the three Vedas. With promise of such blessing, it is not to be wondered at that the worship of Sūrya should continue.

Sūrya, as we have already noticed, is regarded as a son of Aditi, at other times he is said to be a son of Dyāus. Uṣās (the Dawn) is called his wife, though in another passage he is said to be produced by the Dawn. Some texts state that he is the vivifier of all things; whilst others state that he was formed and made to shine by Indra, Soma, Agni and others.

From the character ascribed to Sāvitr in some hymns, it seems more natural to regard him as the sun shining in his strength, and Sūrya as the sun when rising and setting. Sāvitr is golden-eyed, golden-handed, golden-tongued. He rides in a chariot drawn by radiant, white-footed steeds. He illuminates the earth; his golden arms stretched out to bless, infusing energy into all creatures, reach to the utmost ends of heaven. He is the leader and king in heaven; the other gods follow him, and it is he, who gives them immortality. He is prayed to for deliverance from sin, and to conduct the souls of the departed to the abode of the righteous.

In the Purāṇic Age, Sūrya sustains quite a different character. He is called there as the son of Kaśyapa and Aditi. He is described as a dark-red man, with three eyes and four arms; in two hands are water lilies; with one he is bestowing a blessing and with the other he is encouraging

his worshippers. He sits upon a red lotus, and rays of glory issue from his body. In addition to the daily worship that is offered to him by the Brāhmaṇas by the repetition of the Gāyatrī, he is worshipped once a year generally on the first Sunday in the month of Māgha, and in seasons of sickness it is no uncommon thing for the low-caste people to employ an intellectual to repeat some verses in honour of Sūrya, in the hope that the deity thus propitiated will effect their recovery.

In the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, we find the following account of Sūrya. He married Sanjñā, the daughter of Viśvakarmā; who, after bearing him three children, was so oppressed with his brightness and glory, that she was compelled to leave him. Before her departure, she left Chhāyā (shadow) in her place. For years Sūrya did not notice this change of wife. But one day, in a fit of anger, Chhāyā pronounced a curse upon Yama (Death), a child of Sanjñā's, and this curse took effect. Sūrya knew that no mother's curse could affect her offspring, and, wondering how it was that Chhāyā's curse was not harmless, he came to know that his wife had forsaken him, leaving this other woman in her place. Through the power of meditation, Sūrya found Sanjñā in a forest in the form of a mare; and, in order that he might enjoy her society, he changed himself into a horse. After a few years, they grew tired of this arrangement, and returned in proper form to their own dwelling. But in order that his presence might be bearable to his wife, his father-in-law, who was the architect of the gods, ground the Sun upon a stone, and by this means reduced his brightness by one-eighth. The part thus ground from Sūrya was not wasted. From it were produced the wonder-working discus of Viṣṇu, the trident of Śiva, the lance of Kārtikeya (the god of war), and the weapons of Kubera (the god of riches).

The *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa* says, "Because there is none greater than he (*i.e.*, Sūrya), nor has been nor will be, therefore, he is celebrated as the Supreme soul in all the Vedas". Again, "that which is the sun, and thus called light or effulgent power, is adorable, and must be worshipped by those who dread successive births and deaths, and who eagerly desire beatitude." In the *Brahma Purāṇa*, there is a passage in which the sun is alluded to under twelve names, with epithets peculiar to each, as though they were twelve distinct sun-deities—

"The first form of the sun is Indra, the lord of the gods, and the destroyer of their enemies; the second, Dhātā, the creator of all things, the third, Parjanya, residing in the clouds, and showering rain on the earth from its beams; the fourth, Tvaṣṭā, who dwells in all corporeal forms; the fifth, Puṣan, who gives nutriment to all beings; the sixth, Aryamā, who brings sacrifices to a successful conclusion; the seventh derives his name from alms giving, and delights mendicants with gifts; the eighth is called Vivasvān, who ensures digestion; the ninth, Viṣṇu, who constantly manifests himself for the destruction of the enemies of the gods, the tenth, Amṣumān, who preserves the vital organs in a sound state; the eleventh, Varuṇa, who, residing in the waters; vivifies the universe; and the twelfth, Mitra, who dwells in the orb of the moon, for the benefit of the three worlds. These are the twelve splendours of the sun, the supreme spirit, who through them pervades the universe, and irradiates the inmost souls of men".

Sūrya is said to have Aruṇa (Rosy), the Dawn, as his charioteer; who was the son of Kaśyapa and Kadrū.

According to the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Sugrīva, the king of the monkey host which assisted Rāma in his great expedition, was a son of Sūrya by a monkey; according to the *Mahābhārata*, the hero Karna also was the son of this deity; and when he was in the form of a horse, he became father of the Aśvins, and communicated the white *Yajurveda*. When speaking of the planets, Sūrya will be noticed again under the name of Ravi. Among the many names and epithets by which this deity is known, the following are the most common—

Divākara, "The Maker of the day".

Bhāskara, "The Creator of light".

Vivasvat, "The Radiant one".

Mihira, "He who waters the earth", *i.e.*, he draws up the moisture from the seas so that the clouds are formed.

Grahapati, "The Lord of the stars".

Karmasākṣī, "The witness of (Men) works".

Mārtaṇḍa, "A descendant of Mṛtaṇḍa".

The *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa* testifies that the sun was formed by the head of Viṣṇu. According to this story, lord Viṣṇu went to sleep under a tree after killing a demon and continued to remain in that position for long, keeping his head over his bow. The gods then felt disturbed due to the long sleep of Viṣṇu but none could dare to wake him up. Ultimately they commanded the white-ants to eat away the cord of the bow in order to wake up lord Viṣṇu from slumber. In turn they were promised to easily find water even in the desert conditions. The white-ants did so as desired and ultimately the string of the bow broke making a thundering sound, which also blew up the head of Viṣṇu from his body which flew and was turned into a sun in the sky. The gods were upset at the severing of the head of Viṣṇu and made Aśvanikumāras to replace the same with the head of a horse, earning him the title of Hayagrīva. After some time Viṣṇu got back his original form but the sun continued to shine in the sky.

In the vast Indian literature as well as the epigraphical records, there are numerous references in which the grandeur of a particular god or the monarch is equated to the lustre of the sun. There are also instances in which it was claimed that the fame of a particular monarch would continue as long as the sun and the moon shine in the sky. The case of Satī-pillars is an interesting example. In these Satī-pillars, the sun and moon were projected in symbolic form invariably in order to give vent to the idea that the fame of the lady performing *Satī* would remain on earth as long as the sun and the moon illumine the earth. But strangely enough though the ladies performing *Satī* or the monarchs passed away from the human memory, and even the Satī-pillars have vanished and long forgotten, Sūrya, the sun-god continued to remain eternal and as bright as ever.

It is not in India alone, where one commonly finds the adoration of the sun, but in the ancient times it was in vogue in several countries of the world. Indeed the worship of the sun possibly started with the origin of man on earth when he was still a savage, roaming on earth in the pre-historic times, since he could have better visibility, better movement for food collection etc. during the day when the earth was filled with sun-light than in the darkness of night after sun-set. He could better accomplish his feats during the day as compared to the night. He also realised the utility of the sun during winter and gradually became aware of the role played by the sun in food production. The more man became conscious of the importance of the sun the more he was attracted towards adoring it, initially in a symbolic manner, supplemented by other forms. These aspects can be witnessed even to this day in the evidence left by the palaeolithic man in the cave art around the globe, though in the Indian context, these symbols are too conspicuous. The sun worship has been described to be the real and the most ancient religion of India. It is not difficult to understand, as to how in a low land flooded with sunshine and the function of life is dependant on the likely warmth of the sun and his destructive powers are witnessed in the utmost extremes of the heat, it should have been man's primary business to adore him in order to win his favour. The pre-historic cave-man conceived Sūrya in a symbolic form in his own way. The symbolic adoration of the sun continued during the subsequent period as well. There has been a school of thought which had tried to interpret some of the symbols over the Harappan seals as representing the sun. The pre-historic cave art also preserves numerous specimens of symbols representing the sun. Indeed with the passage of time the worship of the sun became the way of life with the people, as would be evident from the prevailing religious practices.

Though currently, there is hardly any sect in India, adoring exclusively the sun-god, still the images of Sūrya are found in several of the Śaivite, Vaiṣṇavite and even the Śākta temples in the country, though some temples exclusively dedicated to the sun-god are also met with. The Sun-temple, Konark, Aihole, Modhera (Gujarat), Khoh, Mandasaur etc. could be cited as example. He is also adored alongwith other planets, the number of which has been described to be nine. The essentials of sun-worship, however, are available in almost all the religious sects in the country; more or less avowedly or in disguise and combined with other cults and his practical and decisive influence on daily life is universally acknowledged.

While viewing the genesis and evolution of the Sun-worship in India and beyond the Indian frontiers, it may be mentioned that one of the earliest temples of the Sun-god has been reported from Ne-Wesere-re, at Abu Ghurab in Egypt which is said to belong to 243 B.C. However, in the Indian context, the earliest evidence of the adoration of the sun can be traced to the Vedic literature. During the Vedic Age, as already discussed earlier, Sūrya as a deity had already developed into a concrete form, showing his chariot as the luminary was always present in the minds of the Vedic seers. As the all seeing god, he is often called the eye of Mitra, Varuṇa, Agni and other gods. The dawns produce Sūrya and he is also described as the son of Aditi, a Vedic goddess of Dyaus. He is also conceived as a ruddy bird or an eagle that soars through the space. He is cognate with Avestic *hvarē*, 'Sun' who has swift horses and who is also conceived as the

eye of Ahura-Mazda. Gradually the iconographical features of Sūrya were developed, highlighting his various forms, some of which are described as under—

(i) *As Agni*

The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* visualises the sun as Agni as well because of some solar qualities available in Agni, making both of them interdependant. This could possibly be the reason why the Vedic people invoked Agni so often on account of the solar qualities present in it. The ancient society living under the protection of the sun, the remover of cold, darkness and the repeller of the disease, enemies and harmful agencies, might have been surprised when it used to witness the fire blazing in the forest. The ancient man conceived fire as the part of the sun or an earthly sun playing before him, providing comfort amidst cold with its pleasing warmth and dispelling darkness by its light. He also learnt by experience that fire or the earthly sun was completely controllable and enjoyable by him. Thus the fire was adopted by man as an other sun on earth which does not set or withholds its light or warmth. Besides Agni is regarded as the son of Dyaus. It is the light which resides in the sky. One of the Aṅgīrasa seers has proclaimed thus—

मूर्धा भुवोभवति नक्तमग्नस्ततः सूर्यो जायते प्रातरुद्यन्।

मायामुतु यज्ञायनेमतामपोयतूणिश्चति प्रजान्॥

—*Rgveda*, X.88.6

(Agni is above the head of the earth; he is the sun, rising in the morning. He who understands this miracle of gods, swiftly moves across the bondage.)

Another hymn of the *Rgveda* speaks on the same lines—

अग्निमीलेपुरोहितं यज्ञस्यदेवमृत्विजम्।

होतारं रत्नधातमम्॥

—*Ibid.*, I.1.1

(I glorify the god Agni, who is self effulgent, the supporter of the universe from all eternity, the illuminator of all activity, the only object of adoration in all seasons and most bounteous and the greatest donor of the splendid wealth.)

This is the first hymn of the *Rgveda* and significantly it begins with Agni describing his attributes. Agni is the name of the god and in the *Rgveda* (I.164.46), it is stated that intellectuals call the adorable god Agni as Indra, the omnipresent; Mitra, the friend of all; Varuṇa, the holiest and he is also *divya* (the divine one) besides being Suparṇa—the protector and Garutmān, the preserver of the universe. He is sometimes called self-effulgent, sometimes Yama, the controller of the universe and sometimes as Mātrīśvān, the life energy of the universe.

इन्द्रं मित्रं वरुणमग्निमाहुरथो दिव्यः स सुपर्णो गरुत्मान्।

एकं सद्विप्रा बहुधावदन्त्यग्निं यमं मातरिरिवानमाहुः॥

—*Ibid.*, I.164.46

(ii) *As a Healer*

In the *Rgveda*, Sūrya has been conceived as a benevolent deity with healing power—

येन सूर्यज्योतिषा वाधसे तमोगच्च विश्वमुदियर्षि भानुना।

तेनास्मद्विश्वमीनरामनाहुति मपामीवामपदुष्वज्यै सुव॥

—*Ibid.*, X.37.4

In another passage of the same text, Sūrya has been eulogised for healing or the removing of the eye ailment—

विश्वा हास्या सुमनसः सुचक्षुसः प्रजायन्तो अनमीवा अनागसः।
उद्यन्तं त्वा मित्रमहो दिवे दिवे ज्योग जीवाः प्रति पचमेव सूर्यः॥

—*Ibid.*, X.37.4

The *Taittirīya Saṁhitā* (11.3.7), also testifies the above qualities of Sūrya in which he is endowed with the power of curing the eye ailment or to improve the eyesight. The *R̥gvedic* text further speaks about the sun having the powers to heal jaundice.

In the *Atharvaveda* (I.122) the healing power of the sun is advocated more emphatically. Besides he is invoked for the removal of several diseases.

(iii) As the Time

In the *R̥gveda* (I.164.14), the sun has been conceived as the one who regulates the time—

सनेमि चक्रमजरं विवावृत उतानायां दशयक्ता वहन्ति।
सूर्यस्य चक्षु रजसैत्यावृतं तस्मिन्नापिता भुवनानि विश्वा॥

The above passage refers to the ten felines, representing the twelve months and three axles which are three double seasons and three hundred and sixty spokes are the days of the luno-solar year. The wheel, which is one, stands for the year. He as a maker of the year determines the year of 360 days. The *Atharvaveda* too describes Sūrya as the Time, while the *Upaniṣads* call him the *Samvatsara* or the year. It is not in India alone that Sūrya was conceived as 'Time' but the same ideology was in vogue in Mithierism where Kronos was believed to be the representative of the Time.

(iv) As a Calf

The *Atharvaveda* contains a passage which equates the sun with a calf, which shines variously and is the bestower of prayers, which is white-black and rises from the horizon. The sun-calf is adored by *ghee*—

वत्सो विराजो वृषभो मतीनामारुरोह शुक्रं सृष्ट्वेऽन्तरिक्षम्।
घृतेनार्कमप्यर्चन्ति वत्सं ब्रह्म सन्त ब्रह्मणा वधयन्ति॥

—*Atharvaveda*, 13.1.33

The same passage also appears in the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* (2.8.9) with certain modifications.

(v) As Brahman

In the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* (3.1), there is a passage which equals the sun with Brahman—

यतो वा इमानि भूतानि जायन्ते।
येन जातानि जीवन्ति।

यत्प्रयन्त्य विशन्ति।
तद्विजिज्ञासास्य। तद् ब्रह्मेति॥

Brahman according to the Brāhmaṇical texts is an omnipresent reality, forming the source, support and the final resort of the world. It is also characterised as the 'truth, knowledge and infinity' (सत्यं ज्ञानमनन्तं ब्रह्म). In a limited sense, the sun embodies these features abundantly. It happens to be the source and support of our limited world, the earth. As the source of light, it makes the world visible to us. In its daily course, it seems to go beyond the extremities of the world. It is also perfectly regular and punctual in its movement. On account of these features, the sun was made the foremost physical symbol of Brahman. The idea of the sun as Brahman is by no means an Upaniṣadic innovation. It is deep rooted in the earliest stratum of the Vedic literature as well. Apart from the fact that in the *R̥gveda*, the sun was regarded as one of the highest gods and was also described as the mover of both the mobile and immobile which all serve as indications of Supremacy as a god. In one of the hymns it is directly said to be Brahman lying in the midst of the heaven and the earth so as to pervade and purify them—

आ दक्षिणा सृज्येत शुष्याह सं वेतिदुहितो रक्षसः पाति जगृविः।
हरिरोपशं कृणुते नमस्यय उपस्तरे चम्बो ३ ब्रह्म निर्णिजे॥

—*R̥gveda*, IX.71.1

(vi) As a Horse

The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* contains a number of passages to emphasise the symbolic affinity between the sacrificial horse and the sun. For instance, at the time of selection it was particularly to be kept in mind that the horse be unparalleled in energy and speed. The reason given in the *Brāhmaṇa* for this is the equation of the sacrificial horse with the sun. Since the sun is unrivalled, the horse is required to be so.

अथ यदक्षिणायान्धुर्यं प्रतिधुर एष वा एव य एष तपति॥

—*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 13.4.2.2

In another context (*Ibid.*, 13.4.2.16), the guards of the horse are instructed not to resist his involvement as he is the sun itself which cannot be restricted in movement. Moreover, while the Upaniṣads regard the rising sun as the forepart of the setting sun as the hindpart of the horse, the *Brāhmaṇa* takes the horse as well as the sun to have been born of Prajāpati.

(vii) As the Eye of Ātmān

One of the most interesting examples of symbolism of Ātmān by divinities in the Upaniṣads is the anecdote in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* in which five persons are said to have come together and enquired about Ātmān and Brahman. Unable to reach any conclusion by themselves, they resolved to approach Uddālaka Aruṇi who was meditating on Ātmān as Vaiśvānara. But when approached, Uddālaka Aruṇi felt himself unable to satisfy them fully. Therefore, he approached Aśvapati Karkeya who was meditating on Vaiśvānara. When all the six met, the latter enquired of them one by one as to their precious notions and the corresponding practices in regard to the

Ātmān. First of all he asked Aupamanyava as to the form in which he meditated Ātmān. Aupamanyava said that he meditated on the Ātmān in the form of the heaven Vaiśvānara or in the form of good light. In his view heaven constituted the head of Ātmān. Then the king informed him that the heaven was the Ātmān. He cautioned Aupamanyava that had the latter not approached him, he was sure to have lost his head.

He then put the same question to Satyayajña Paulusi and in response was told by the latter that he meditated on the Ātmān in the form of the sun. The king then told him that the sun was Ātmān Vaiśvānara in the universal form. He characterised the sun as the eye of Ātmān. He, however, cautioned Paulasi that had he not approached him, he was sure to have lost his eyesight (*Chāndagyo Upaniṣad*, 5.13.2).

(viii) As the Giver of Light

The primary function of Sūrya is to illumine the universe with his sunshine. This aspect of the sun was a universal phenomena, known to the entire populace, the world over. Not only that even the birds, animals and other creatures are well aware of the same. There are some creatures in the universe who move during the daytime alone, while the others move during the night. Thus for both types of creatures, the sunshine effects differently. This aspect was well known to the Vedic seers. The *R̥gveda* (I.50.2) emphasises on the point that at the appearing of the all illuminating sun, the constellations depart from the sight like thieves. It is further stated (X.37.4) that the sun is the source of light and his departure brings darkness of night. He dispells darkness with light (VII.63.1) and he rolls up the darkness as the skin. In the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* (1.4.31.39), the illuminating aspect of the sun is amply highlighted many times and the sun is also described as the highest light. In the *Atharvaveda* (XIII.1.24), however, there is the mention of the chariot of the sun, which is driven by seven horses.

In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (8.7.1.15), the sun has been described as the *Viśvajyoti*. In the Upaniṣads, the same tradition is continued with the difference that Sūrya's light is interpreted in the highest spiritual term. In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, it is stated that the sun may unveil the face of Brahman covered with the veil of ignorance by spreading the light.

(ix) As a Swan or R̥ta

The *R̥gveda* (IV.40.50) has a passage which is addressed to Sūrya describing him as the luminary like a swan dwelling in the space, the Vasu dwelling in the atmosphere, the priest at the altar, the guest in the sacrificial jar and the one who dwells in humans, in gods, and R̥ta in the sky. He is said to have been born in water, on the earth, in R̥ta in mountain and finally he is characterised as R̥ta itself.

हंसः शुचिषद्वसुरन्तरिक्षं सोद्धता वैदिषदतिथिर्दुरोणसत्।

नृषद्वरसदृत सदयोमसदब्जा गोजा ऋतजा अद्रिजा ऋतम्॥

—*R̥gveda*, IV.40.50

(x) *As Progenitor*

The sun is sometimes also conceived as the one who is responsible for progeny. Folktales all over the world project the sun as progenitor. In the Sicilian tale a king, who had no issue summoned a wizard to enquire from the latter whether he would have a son or not, the wizard replied that his queen will have a daughter who in her fourteenth year will be impregnated by the sun. In a Greek story from Epirus, a woman prayed to the sun for a daughter, promising him, that he may take her away when she reached twelve years of age. But on the girl's reaching that age, she evaded the promise and hid the girl in the house, blocking all the windows, chinks and holes. But she forgot to plug the keyhole. The sun sent a ray through the key hole to seize the maiden.

A Christian missionary visited Siam in the seventh century A.D. and found a story current in the region according to which Siamese Buddha was born of a virgin who had retired to the depth of the forest in order to avert with the sun, who was expected to appear shortly. One day, however, when she was busy in her prayers, she was impregnated by the rays of the sun. The innocent maiden was ashamed to find herself with a child and flew to a solitary desert in order to evade the society. Miraculously she delivered the baby on the bank of the lake. Since she was unable to suckle the child, having no milk with her, and since she could not bear the thought of seeing the infant die, she jumped into the water, where she placed the infant over the flowerbud which flew off itself for his more commodious reception and later on placed him in a cradle.

In the Indian context, this aspect of the sun is fully projected in the *Mahābhārata* wherein Karna, the mighty hero of the Epic is said to have been of Kuntī, by the sun-god. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, however, Sugrīva, the monkey king of Kiṣkindhā is reported to have been born from Sūrya. The Indian tradition further claims that the Sun had a role to play in making the barren ladies fertile.

The women in Gujarat desiring a male offspring worship the sun on Sundays, which are particularly associated with the sun.

The ancient Parsees believed that the beam of the rising sun was the most effective means for impregnating the newly wedded bride. In the present times also in Persia as well as among the Tatars of Central Asia, the morning after the marriage has been consummated, the newly weds are brought out to be greeted by the rising Sun.

(xi) *As Mārtaṇḍa*

Sūrya is also addressed as Mārtaṇḍa in the Indian literature which literally means 'Son of a lifeless Egg'. In the *Rgveda* (X.72.7-8) the sun has been conceived as Mārtaṇḍa—

यद्देवा यतयो यथा भुवनान्यपिन्वत।
अत्रा समुद्र आगूळ्हमा सूर्य मजभर्तन॥
अष्टौपुत्रासौ अदितेयौ जातास्तन्व १ स्परि।
देवौ उप प्रैत्सप्तभि परामार्तण्डमास्यत्॥

—*Rgveda*, X.72.7-8

There are two entities namely *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti*. *Puruṣa* is life (*Prāṇa*, *cetanā*) and *Prakṛti* is the lifeless matter. This phenomenon was clearly grasped and explained in Vedic and Purāṇic cosmogony as *Hiraṇyagarbhā-vidyā*. It has to be clearly understood that the Egg (*viraja*) represents the *Prakṛti* or the Matter. It is a dead egg, for there is no life or consciousness in *Prakṛti* in all its modalities or the level of creation. The region of *Prakṛti* is called *Prakṛta-Sarga* in the Purāṇas. The material lifeless egg awaits to be quickened by the principle of life or consciousness symbolised by *Puruṣa*. Metaphorically *Puruṣa* himself enters into the egg by means of its seed and the mother's ovum becomes fertilised. This fecundating principle is called *Hiraṇya* (gold) which is the Vedic symbol of *Prāṇa* or life. This is also spoken as *Hiraṇyāṇḍa*, the golden germ. It is produced in the womb of a dead egg and therefore gets a new metromymic epithet as *Mārtaṇḍa* (मार्तण्ड) in the *Rgveda* and *Mārtaṇḍa* (मार्तण्ड) in the Purāṇas and the classical Sanskrit literature. (मृतण्डे जायते यस्मात् मार्तण्डस्तेन। *Matsya Purāṇa*, 2.36). This *Mārtaṇḍa* is the same as *Sūrya*, the supreme principle of consciousness in cosmos. One need not commit the error of taking *Sūrya* as the physical sun, but justly understand it as the Supernal sun, who is the same as Brahman, the transcendent source of life and the highest reality (ब्रह्म सूर्यं समं ज्योतिः। *Yajurveda*, 23.48).

That which is termed as *Sūrya* is the same as Indra, Agni, *Tejas* or *Tapas* and many other appellations have been applied to him in the Vedic and the Purāṇic literature. In case one understands this principle clearly, there would be no confusion in the bewildering variety of names. The same is called *Vaisaja*, Manu or *Vaivasvata Manu* as the arch ancestor of the human race or as the source from which life has descended in the long chain of a thousand or countless generations.

According to chapter 32 of the *Brahma Purāṇa*, the reason for calling the sun as *Mārtaṇḍa* has been explained, according to which Aditi once worshipped the sun in order to beget a powerful son who could rule the universe. Her wish was granted and soon she became pregnant. During pregnancy, she observed the life of chastity and celibacy, performing all the *vrata*s and consuming limited food. Kaśyapa once got annoyed at the fasting of Aditi saying, "Why are you killing the egg by fasting?"

किं मारयसि गर्भाण्डमिति नित्योपवासिनी॥

Aditi became equally annoyed and aborted the egg which was effulgent like the sun. Ultimately it took the form of *Āditya* and was named as *Mārtaṇḍa*, because Kaśyapa had thought it to be a dead egg—

मारितमितियत् प्रोक्तमेतदण्डं त्वयादितेः।

तस्मान्मुने सुतस्तेऽयं मार्तण्डाख्यो भविष्यति॥

Besides the above, *Sūrya* has been conceived in the texts in several other forms, but in the texts on iconography, he has been conceived as moving on the chariot driven by seven horses and the charioteer has been described as *Aruṇa*, the elder brother of *Garuḍa*. He is also associated with lotus flowers which also serve as his hand attributes.

(xii) *Purāṇic Form of Sūrya*

In the Purāṇic period the personalities of the Vedic gods like Vivasvān, Savitā, Puṣaṇ and Aryamā were merged with Sūrya in the Purāṇas, turning him to be quite a powerful one of all the other gods. Ultimately a separate cult came into being for the worship of the Sun and in the ancient times for hundreds of years people worshipped the sun who removed all the darkness, remover of ailments, granter of various boons. In the *Matsya Purāṇa* (52.21), Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva and Sūrya were conceived in composite form—

ब्रह्मा विष्णुश्च भगवान् मार्तण्डो वृषवाहनः।
इमा विभूतयः प्रोक्ता चराचरसमन्विताः॥
ब्रह्मादीनां परं धाम त्रयाणामपि संस्थितिः।
वेदमूर्तावतः पूषा पूजनीयः प्रयत्नतः॥

The term वेदमूर्तावतः पूषा पूजनीयः प्रयत्नतः॥ justifies that the word Pūṣa stands totally for Sūrya. Similarly in the *Matsya Purāṇa* (78.6-7), both Pūṣa and Aryamā have been used to denote Sūrya. In this case these names have been used while performing the vow for the sake of Sūrya—

दक्षिणे तद्वदकार्यं तथाऽर्यम्णेति नैऋते।
पूष्णेत्युत्तरतः पूज्यमानन्दायेत्वतः परम्॥

In the *Padma Purāṇa* (76.35) various Vedic epithets for Sūrya have been made use of while praying Sūrya—

सुवर्णिता मित्रश्च पूषा त्वष्टा गमस्तिमान्।

In the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* the epithets of Vivasvān and Savitā have been used for Sūrya—

नमो विवस्वते ब्रह्मभास्वते विष्णुतेजसे।
जगत्सवित्रे शुचये सवित्रे कर्मसाक्षिणे॥

The epithet of Savitā has been completely used to denote Sūrya in the *Brahma Purāṇa* (83.22)—

तत्पुत्रवचनं श्रुत्वा सविताऽचिन्तयत् तदा।

In the *Śrīmadbhāgavata Purāṇa* (5.7.14), the king Bharata eulogises Āditya. With the following verse, the composition of which seems to have been influenced with the Vedic Sun—

परोरजः सवितुर्जातवेदो देवस्य भर्गो मनसेदं जजान।

The Vedic Sūrya represents the material aspect of the orb of the sun, but gradually, his personality was completed and he became a full-fledged god onto himself, absorbing all other epithets like Aryamā, Puṣaṇ, Mitra and others on to himself. Since the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, happens to be far older than the Purāṇas, the personality of Sūrya in the latter texts seems to have been influenced with the one of Sūrya projected in the Epic, which indeed provides him a divine nature. In the Uttara-kāṇḍa it has been stated that Hanumān intended to swallow the sun taking it to be a ripe fruit. It has been brought out therein that once Rāhu was going to

eclipse the sun to satisfy his hunger, but the poet turns to the divine form of the sun saying that Hanumān could be reduced to ashes by the sun, but taking him to be a child, he became compassionate, since the sun could further realise that Hanumān was to perform an important task of the gods in future—

शिशुरेष त्वदोषज्ञ इति मत्वा दिवेश्वरः।

कार्यं चात्र समायत्तमित्येवं न ददाह सः॥

—*Uttara-kāṇḍa*, 35.30

In chapter 150 of the Ādi-parvan of the *Mahābhārata*, an ancient tale concerning Sūrya and Vivasvān has been narrated which combines the divine as well as the material functions of Sūrya. The same story has also been adopted in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (8.13), *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (3.2.2-12), *Matsya Purāṇa*, 11.1-41, *Vāyu Purāṇa* (84) and the *Brahma Purāṇa* (Ch. 89). According to this story, Sūrya had a wife named Sanjñā (Sareṇu, Sureṇu or Uṣā), who happened to be the daughter of Tvaṣṭā or Viśvakarmā. He had a son named Yama and a daughter named Yamī. The lustre of Sūrya (Mārtaṇḍa) was so scorching that Sanjñā could not bear it for long. Out of her own body, she created another damsel who was given the name of Suvarṇā or Chāyā. Sanjñā then entrusted the care of her husband and children to Chāyā and went to a forest where she started performing *tapas* in the form of a mare. Two sons named Śani and Manu were born to Chāyā from Sūrya. Initially Sūrya could not detect the duplicity of his wife, but in due course of time the sun noticed the mean nature of Chāyā and her cruelty towards children, he developed a doubt. With his divine vision he came to realise that the true Sanjñā was performing *tapas*. He also reached the place of Sanjñā and two Aśvinikumāras were born of their union. Both of them then reached the abode of Tvaṣṭā, where Sanjñā complained about the excessive lustre of Sūrya, which was unbearable to her. At this the divine architect Tvaṣṭā reduced the lustre of the sun with the use of his workmanship. The parts which were rubbed off from the body of Sūrya were made use of by making a *cakra* for Viṣṇu and a trident for Śiva. The account available in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (3.2.2-11) is reproduced below—

सूर्यस्य पत्नी संज्ञाभूत् तनया विश्वकर्मणः।

मनुर्यमो यमी चैव तदपत्यानि वै मुने॥२॥

असहन्ती तु साभर्तुस्तेजश्छायां युयोज वै।

भर्तुशुश्रूषणेरण्ये स्वयं च तपसे ययौ॥३॥

छायासंज्ञा ददौ शापं यमाय कुपिता यदा।

तदा नेयमसौ बुद्धिरित्यासीद् यमसूर्ययोः॥५॥

ततो विवस्वानाख्याते तयैवारण्यसंस्थिताम्॥

समाधिदृष्ट्या ददृशे तामश्वां तपसि स्थिताम्॥६॥

आनिन्ये स पुनः संज्ञां स्वस्थानं भगवान् रविः।

तेजसः शमनं चास्य विश्वकर्मा चकार ह॥८॥

भ्रमिमारोप्य सूर्यं तु तस्य तेजोनिशातनम्।

कृतवानष्टमं भागं स व्यशातयदव्ययम्॥९॥

यत्तस्माद् वैष्णवं तेजः शातितं विश्वकर्मणा।
 जाज्वल्यमानमपतद् भूमौ मुनिसत्तम॥10॥
 त्वष्टैवं तेजसा तेन विष्णोश्चक्रमकल्पयत्।
 त्रिशूलं चैव शर्वस्य शिविकां धनदस्य च॥11॥

The same story is repeated in several other Purāṇas with slight variations here and there. Evidently the story stands for the following of Uṣā by Sūrya and achieving her in the west on the basis of the Vedic texts. But the poet has provided a glimpse of the family life of the Sun conceiving him in a human form. In the lower half of the above passage, only the orb of the sun has been referred to. It may be recalled here that the story of Vivasvān and Sanjñā has also been repeated in the *Bṛhaddevatā* (7.1-7), slight indications of which are also noticed in the *R̥gveda*.

It has been stated in the Vana-parvan (206.5) of the *Mahābhārata*, that Sūrya is a globe of lustre, but those possessing the divine sight can see him in a human form wearing the *kavacas* and the *kuṇḍalas*. In the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (4.13.95), some special qualities of the form of Sūrya have been brought out. It is stated therein that getting pleased with the prayer of Satrajit, lord Sūrya descended on earth and Tvaṣṭā found him (the sun) to be of dwarfish size, extremely bright, having the complexion of copper and yellowish eyes—

ततस्तम् आताम्रोज्ज्वलं ह्रस्वपुष्पम् ईषद् आपिंगलनयनम् आदित्यमद्राक्षीत्।

These details certainly identify the iconographical features of the Sun-god, who in the Vedic literature was provided with a chariot as his vehicle, driven by the seven steed. This divine form of Sūrya has been projected repeatedly in the *Mahābhārata*. He by nature is a largehearted god who protects his devotees, good in charity. In the third chapter of the Vana-parvan of the *Mahābhārata*, Yudhiṣṭhira adores Sūrya for his livelihood, who was pleased with the prayer and bestows him a divine vase by which the Pāṇḍavas can always have the food of their liking. In the Virāṭa-parvan (15.19-20), the terrified Draupadī adores Sūrya to save her chastity from the wicked Kīcaka. Sūrya then deposes a demon for the protection of Draupadī. It is also mentioned in the Ādi-parvan (110) and Vana-parvan (307.28) of the *Mahābhārata*, that Kuntī, the mother of Pāṇḍavas, was impregnated by Sūrya and a son named Karṇa was born to her. Kuntī was the daughter of Kuntibhojā. She got a *mantra* by pleasing Durvāsa, by which she could invoke any god. In order to test the effectiveness of the *mantra*, she invoked Sūrya and by coming in contact with the sun, she was impregnated and Karṇa was born. It is also stated in the Epic (Vana-parvan, 301.1-10) that Karṇa could communicate direct with Sūrya after taking his bath. When Indra conspires to take away in charity the *kavaca* and *kuṇḍalas* of Karṇa, the Sun-god forewarned Karṇa (Vana-parvan, 300.10-20).

Sūrya has also been conceived as the possessor of the various types of knowledge. In the Śānti-parvan of the *Mahābhārata* (318.6-12), it has been brought out that Yājñavalkya, the pupil of Vaiśāmpāyana achieved the knowledge of *Śukla-yajurveda* from Sūrya. The same story has been repeated in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (3.5.1.21) and *Śrīmadbhāgavata Purāṇa* (12.6.61-73).

According to this story, getting annoyed, Vaiśāṃpāyana once asked his pupil Yājñavalkya to vomit out all the knowledge he had received from the former—

ततः क्रुद्धो गुरुः प्राह याज्ञवल्क्यं महामुनिम्।

मुच्यतां यत् त्वयाधीतं मत्तो विप्रावमानक॥

—*Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, 3.5.8

In obedience to the command of Vaiśāṃpāyana, Yājñavalkya vomited out at once the personified *Yajurveda* in human form, which was soaked in blood. He then prayed to Sūrya in order to receive the knowledge of *Yajurveda* afresh—

ऋग्यजुःसामभूताय त्रयीधाम्ने च ते नमः; विष्णु०

—*Ibid.*, 3.5.15

Sūrya then appeared in the form of a horse and parted with the knowledge of the hymns of *Yajurveda*, which were even unknown to his teacher. Since Sūrya recited the Vedic hymns, in the form of a horse (Vaji), the collection of those hymns were given the name of *Vājasneyī Samhitā*—

एवमुक्तो ददौ तस्मै यजूषि भगवान् रविः।

अयातयाम संज्ञानि यानि वेत्ति न तद्गुरुः॥

.... वाजिनस्ते समाख्याताः सूर्योऽप्यश्वोऽभवद्यतः॥

—*Ibid.*, 3.5.27-28

In the Epic of *Rāmāyaṇa*, Sūrya imparts to the child Hanumān, the knowledge of all the faculties—

यदा तु शास्त्राण्यध्येतुं बुद्धिरस्य भविष्यति।

तदास्य शास्त्रं दास्यामि येन वाग्मी भविष्यति॥

—*Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, 7.16.14

When Hanumān grew old, he attained the knowledge of all the *Śāstras* from Sūrya, by following him—

असौ पुनर्व्याकरणं ग्रहीष्यन् सूर्योन्मुखः पृष्ठगमः कपीन्द्रः।

उद्यद्गिरेरस्तगिरिं जगाम ग्रन्थं महद् धारयन्प्रमेयः॥

—*Ibid.*, 7.36.45

In the *R̥gveda* (I.164.2), there is the mention of the single wheeled chariot which is driven by nine horses, and is indestructible—

सप्तं युजन्ति रथमेकचक्रमेको अश्वो वहति सप्तनामा।

त्रिणाभि चक्रमजरमनर्व यत्रेमा विश्वा भुवनाधि तस्थुः॥

The chariot of the sun has been further defined in *Matsya Purāṇa* (125.38), *Vāyu Purāṇa* (51.60-76) and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (5.21.13). The seven metres like Tristup and others are said to be the horses of the solar chariot. *Samvatsara* or the year is the solitary wheel of the chariot, twelve spokes (twelve months), six tyres (six seasons) and three navels (three parts of four months each). Its axle-tree is fixed (at one end) to the top of Mount Meru and the other end is placed over the Manasottara mountain. Fixed to it is the wheel of Sun's chariot, which rotates like the wheel of an oil mill over the Mount Manasottara.

यस्यैकं चक्रं द्वादशारं षण्णेभि त्रिणामि संवत्सरात्मकम् आमनन्ति।

In *Matsya Purāṇa* (174.21-23), the chariot of the sun is said to have a thousand rays, is driven by seven steed and divides the day and night by having a round of the Meru mountain—

सूर्यः सप्ताश्वयुक्तेन रथेनामितगामिना।
 श्रिया जाज्वल्यमानेन दीप्यमानैश्च रश्मिभिः॥
 उदयास्तगचक्रेण मेरुपर्वतगामिना॥
 सहस्ररश्मियुक्तेन भ्राजमानेन तेजसा।
 चचार मध्ये लोकानां द्वादशात्मा दिनेश्वरः॥

(The god Sun also came in his chariot drawn by swift seven horses having beautiful rains, moving round Meru illuminating Udayācala and Aṣṭācala mountains and illuminating all the realms, adorned with many rays, shining with his own lustre, the lord of twelve Ādityas graced the battle-field.)

In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (5.22.3), it has been further testified that the sun is the form of the Vedas and is also the form of Nārāyaṇa who divides himself in twelve parts of Ādityas for the sake of the people and also the seasons—

स एष भगवानादिपुरुष एव साक्षान्नारायणो लोकानां स्वस्तये आत्मानं त्रयीमयं
 कर्मविशुद्धिनिमित्तं कविभिरपि च वेदेन विजिज्ञास्यमानो द्वादशधा विभज्य षट्सु
 वसन्तादिषु ऋतुषु यथोपजोषम् ऋतुगुणान् विदधाति।

In the above passage it has been emphasised that the Sun is the same as glorious Nārāyaṇa, the First Person (the prime cause of the universe). He is enquired into by learned sages with the Vedas. For the well-being of the people and for the purification (and timely performance) of ritualistic acts, he divided his body which is the embodiment of three Vedas into twelve parts. He creates the characteristics (such as heat and cold) in the six seasons like the spring etc., for enjoying fruits of the *karmas*.

It has been brought out in the *Yajurveda* (3.19), that the fire during the night comprises of the lustre of the sun. The same ideology is propounded in the *Matsya Purāṇa* (128.10-11) in a somewhat modified form—

प्रभा सौरी तु पादेन अस्तं याति दिवाकरे।
 अग्निमाविशते रात्रौ तस्मादग्निः प्रकाशते॥
 उदिते तु पुनः सूर्ये ऊष्माणेस्तु समाविशेत्।
 पादेन तेजसश्चाग्नेः तस्मात् सन्तपते दिवा॥

(When the sun sets, one-fourth of his lustre enters into fire. Therefore the fire looks so bright in the night. When the sun rises, one-fourth of the heat of fire, enters into him, therefore he imparts heat in the day.)

Accordingly this mutual infusion of the heat and the lustre of the fire and the sun into each other, cause the days and the nights with their above mentioned properties.

The solar eclipse also finds mention in the *R̥gveda* (V.40-5-8), for the first time, according to which a demon named Svarabhānu had covered Sūrya with darkness—

यत् त्वा सूर्यं स्वर्भानुस्तमसा अविध्यद् असुरः।

But the *Tuittirīya Saṁhitā* (2.1.2) and *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (5.3.2.2), contain a story in this connection according to which the demon Svarabhānu, once attacked Sūrya and overpowered him with darkness. Thereafter both Agni and the moon made strenuous efforts and revived the lustre of the sun. The same demon Svarabhānu was converted into Rāhu in the Purāṇic texts. It finds mention in the Uttara-kāṇḍa (35.31) of the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* (Ādi-parvan, 19.5). The latter text testifies that the demon named Svarabhānu taking to the form of a god was engaged in consuming the nectar but was spotted by the sun and the moon who revealed the secret. Viṣṇu then cut off the head of the demon. Preserving the ancient enmity, Rāhu eclipses often the sun and the moon. The story also projects the divine form of the sun.

3

Gods of the Space

1. VIṢṆU

(i) The Earliest Form

Yask has defined Viṣṇu in the *Nirukta* (12.18), विष्णुविशतेवी व्यप्रनोतवी॥ Otherwise the formation of the word Viṣṇu has been traced from the root विस् or वि+अश् (or to pervade). The *Bṛhaddevatā* in this connection opines that the formation of the word Viṣṇu could be traced from the roots विष्, विश् or वेविष् which mean to persuade. Thus the word Viṣṇu stands for someone who pervades the entire universe. Since, however, the sun pervades the entire universe, he has also been taken to represent Viṣṇu—

विष्णातेविशतेवा स्यात् वेवेष्टेव्याप्तिकर्मणः।
विष्णुनिरुच्यते सूर्यः सर्वः सर्वान्तरश्च यः॥ —2.89

But while discussing over the formation of the word Viṣṇu, emphasis has been laid on this point alone as would be evident from the following instances—

- (1) जगद्विष्टमनाचैव विष्णुरेवेति कीर्त्यते।
व्याप्तं त्वयैव विशता त्रैलोक्यं सचराचरम्॥

—*Matsya Purāṇa*, 248.41

- (2) विष्णु सर्वप्रवेशनात्।

—*Liṅga Purāṇa*, 70.97; *Bṛhamāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 1.4.25

- (3) यस्माद् विष्टम् इदं सर्वं वामनेन महात्मना।
तस्मात् स वै स्मृतो विष्णु विशोर्घातो प्रवेशनात्॥

—*Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, 3.1.46; *Kūrma Purāṇa*, 51.26

In the Śānti-parvan of the *Mahābhārata* (341.43), Viṣṇu has himself been made to declare that “I have pervaded the earth and the sky. I am known as Viṣṇu since I pervade the entire universe”. Nilakaṇṭha, the well known commentator of the *Mahābhārata* (Śānti-parvan, 341.42) has observed about the formation of the word Viṣṇu as follows—

विष्णु व्याप्तौ विशप्रवेशने ण्यु प्रस्रवणे एतेषा मन्यतमस्य
रूपं विष्णु इति अभिप्रेत्याह। विच्छन्ति गच्छन्ति
लीयन्ते अस्मिन्। विच्छन्ति अस्मात् लोकाः इति वा।
देवेष्टि व्याप्नोति इति वा। विच्छयति दीयते इति वा॥

In this commentary, Nilakaṇṭha has tried to trace the origin of the word Viṣṇu from the roots विष्, विश as well as ण्यु which seems to be quite appropriate. The other texts have also tried to derive the word Viṣṇu from the root विच्छ। During the period of the *Brāhmaṇas*, Viṣṇu with

his ever increasing influence, left behind the other Vedic gods, emerged as the supreme lord. The *Brāhmaṇa* texts point to another origin of the word Viṣṇu, according to which अथ यद् विषितो भवति तद्विष्णुः॥ According to this interpretation its origin is traced to 'षिञ् वन्धने' root and it stands for broad, free, independent, open (*Ṛgveda*, V.83.8). In some of the hymns of the *Ṛgveda*, Viṣṇu was summoned by Indra, to help the latter in the subjugation of Vṛtra in order to free the cows forcibly taken by him.

Bloomfield, on the other hand, feels that the word Viṣṇu is the combination of वि+सु. According to him सु stands for the surface of the mountain top, while वि appears for through. Thus the word Viṣṇu according to him stands for "the god who pervading the surface of the earth and moves to the top". The glory of Viṣṇu in the *Ṛgveda* lies in the feat in which he covers the entire universe with his three steps. The following hymn of the *Sāmaveda* surely points towards this direction—

इदं विष्णु वि चक्रमे पृथिव्या अधि सानिव।

—2.1024

Oldenberg, on the other hand, has also emphasised on the identity of Viṣṇu as the one who is god expanding or pervading the universe or the one who could cross over the vast area of the earth. In the *Ṛgveda* (I.46.13; VII.100.4), Viṣṇu is invoked for the spreading of flowers on earth. He is endowed in the Vedic texts with attributive epithets like *Urukrama*, *Urugāya* (the one with great strides), *Trivikrama* (the one with three strides), etc. Sakapuni, one of the ancient commentators, interprets the three steps as the course of the solar deity through the three divisions of the universe, the god being manifest in the threefold form, as Agni on earth, Indra or Vāyu in the atmosphere and Sūrya in the sky. Aṇṇabhāva, another ancient interpreter of the Vedas, however, is of the opinion that the three strides relate to the apparent progress of the sun through the firmament. These three steps, in course of time developed into the myth relating to the dwarf incarnation of Viṣṇu of the Purāṇic period, who happened to be the fifth in the stereotyped list of the ten incarnations of Viṣṇu. The idea of the motion, with far extending regular motion, is constantly associated with Viṣṇu in the Vedas, but the special character of the Purāṇic Viṣṇu as the preserver and the benevolent deliverer is also outlined there. His gradual rise to importance in the late Vedic period, however, was primarily due to his having been identified with sacrifice. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (14.1.1), records a myth, in which Viṣṇu was identified with sacrifice, because he emerged as the most prominent among the gods by first comprehending the nature. Still there is no doubt about the fact that even in the period of the *Brāhmaṇas* he did not appear as the central figure in a cult pre-eminently theistic in character, which would require the making of the images.

Viṣṇu seems to be closely connected with the Sun in one form or the other according to the Vedic as well as the post-Vedic literature. As has been described that the sun-god measured with his glory the *Parthiva-loka* of the universe (यः पार्थिवानि विमने स एतसो रजांसि देवाः सविता महित्वना। *Ṛgveda*, V.81.3). Similarly Viṣṇu too in several contexts has been mentioned as measuring the earth—

विष्णोर्नुकं वीर्याणि प्रवोचं यः पार्थिवानि विममे रजांसि।

—*Rgveda*, I.15.11

योरजांसिविममे पार्थिवानि त्रिश्चिद् विष्णुर्मनवेवाधिताय॥ —*Ibid.*, VI.49.13

This quality of Viṣṇu indeed points to his moving around the earth. In the *Atharvaveda* (V.26.7), Viṣṇu is conceived to be closely associated with the heat—

विष्णुयनक्तु बहुधा तपांसि॥

—*Atharvaveda*, V.2.7

It is indeed the sun who controls the year, months, days and the seasons. Keeping this aspect in view the *Atharvaveda* (I.155.6), states that Viṣṇu with his ninety horses, with four names, rotates like the wheel—

चतुर्भिः साकं सवति च नामाभि चक्रं न वुतं व्यतीरवीविपत्।

वृहच्छरीरो विनिमान क्रवमिर्युवाकुमाराः प्रत्येत्यवाहवम्॥

The ancient Vedic literature speaks of four seasons and ninety horses stand for each season lasting for three months. The year has been conceived as the *Kālacakra* in the *Purāṇas*. [cf. *Śrīmadbhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa* (5.21.13). There is an astonishing story in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (14.1.1); *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* (5.1.1), and *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* (7.5.6-16). According to this story, once lord Viṣṇu was sleeping resting his head over his bow. The white-ants ate away the string of the bow, which resulted into its breaking, creating the thundering sound. Simultaneously the head of Viṣṇu was also severed and it was blown over to the sky and was turned into the form of the sun. This story is also retold in the *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa* with slight variations in which the goddess restores the head of Viṣṇu with that of the head of a horse, earning him the title of Hayagrīva. In the later literature, Garuḍa has been conceived to be the vehicle of Viṣṇu. Garuḍa has also been known by the names of Garutmat and Suparṇa. Both these epithets have been used for Garuḍa in the *Rgveda* and has been projected as a bird who could fly with great speed—

उक्षासमुद्रो अरुषः सुपर्णः पूर्वाय योनिं पितुरा विवेश।

मध्ये दिवो निहितः पृश्निरश्मा विचक्रमे रजसस्यात्यन्तौ॥

—*Rgveda*, I.47.3

In the Epic and the Purāṇic age, Viṣṇu is regarded as the most influential member of the Brāhmaṇical triad, Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva, respectively being the creator, the preserver and the destroyer. But Viṣṇu around whom the mighty Brāhmaṇical cult grew up was really a result of syncretism of three god concepts—the Mangod-Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, the Vedic Sun-god Viṣṇu and the cosmic god Nārāyaṇa of the Brāhmaṇas. Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, the Satvata hero, was really at the root of the Bhakti-cult that came to be designated as Vaiṣṇava at a comparatively late stage in its growth, his earlier names being Ekantika, Bhagavatu, Pancaratra, Satvatact. This Kṣatriya chief with some of his relations, Saṁkarsana, the elder brother, Pradyumna, the eldest son by Rukmiṇī, Samba the son of Jambavati and Aniruddha (Pradyumna's son) came to be defined by his followers and admirers. In the cult that grew around him, he and his relations were at first

assigned the position of hero gods, the holy Pancavīras of the Vṛṣṇi clan (cf. the Mora well inscription and the *Vāyu Purāṇa* speak similarly). But shortly afterwards, Samba was eliminated from this list of deified heroes by the theologians of the cult and the remaining four (Vasudeva as the fountain head, the three others being his successive emanatory forms) were regarded as typifying the different aspects of the great god Para-Vāsudeva. The systematisers of the cult-tenets did not take much time in transforming the Vira concept about the central deity and some of his relations into the *Vyuha* or emanation concept of the principal cult god. Vāsudeva was identified with Viṣṇu and Nārāyaṇa sometime before the beginning of the Christian era. According to the re-oriented ideology of the cult the one god Vāsudeva Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇa, could be conceived in his five-fold aspect or form; these were Para—the highest *vyuha*—the emanatory, Vāsudeva—the incarnatory, Antarayamin—the inner controller of all the beings and Arccā, the images. It is with the last aspect of the god, which relates to the iconography of the god.

In the subsequent religious texts the presence of Viṣṇu is frequently noticed. In the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmiki, Rāma is conceived to be an incarnation of Viṣṇu. In the beginning of the epic, the gods are said to have approached Viṣṇu to incarnate on earth in human form in order to subjugate the demon king Rāvaṇa, who had become invincible due to the boons granted by Brahmā to him. Lord Viṣṇu therefore not only promised the gods that he would incarnate on earth in order to lessen the burden of the earth, but the gods too were advised by Brahmā to incarnate on earth in the form of monkeys in order to be helpful to the lord Viṣṇu, during the period of his story on earth in human form. Viṣṇu enjoys quite a prominent position in this epic that his one thousand names have been spelt out for the first time in the Anuśāsana-parvan of the epic. No doubt in the *Rāmāyaṇa* the presence of Viṣṇu is testified, but he does not enjoy therein the same importance as he does in the *Mahābhārata*. Besides the text also testifies to Viṣṇu's capability to incarnate on earth in variety of forms. In support of this the man-lion, the boar, Rāma, Vāmana, Kṛṣṇa, Hayagriva are found mentioned. Interestingly in the list of the thousand names of Viṣṇu, spelt out in the *Mahābhārata*, the following names connect him to the sun-god—

- (i) *Sahasraṁsu* (64)
- (ii) *Gabhastinemi* (65)
- (iii) *Vihayasagati* (107)
- (iv) Ravi
- (v) Virocana
- (vi) Sūrya
- (vii) Savitā

In the *Matsya Purāṇa* (Ch. 8.4), it is stated that Viṣṇu happens to be the lord of the *Jyotiṣpiṇḍas*. The same aspect is highlighted in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (2.8.33) as follows—

मैत्रेय केशवः सूर्यः तत्प्रभा कमलालया॥

The *Brahma Purāṇa*, on the other hand, testifies that Sūrya is the same as Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī happens to be his Śakti—

यश्चसूर्यः स वै विष्णु यश्च विष्णु सभास्करः।

In the *Padma Purāṇa* (Sṛsthi, 2.173), the epithet of Padmanābha has been used for the sun-god. Needless to say that the lotus had emerged out of the navel of lord Viṣṇu according to the Purāṇic account. The epithet of Nārāyaṇa used for Viṣṇu also is related to the sun-god. The *Matsya Purāṇa* (165.1), states that in the Satya-yuga, Nārāyaṇa took to the form of the sun-god, illumined the entire universe—

भूत्वा नारायणो योगी सत्यमूर्ति विभावसुः।
गम्भीरः प्रदीप्राग्नि संशोधयति सागरात्॥

Similarly, *Śrīmadbhāgavata* (5.20.5) has also equated Viṣṇu with Sūrya—

प्रलस्य विष्णो रूपं च सत्यस्य ऋतस्य
ब्रह्मणो अमृतस्य च मृत्योश्च सूर्यमात्मानम् ईमहि॥

With the popularity of Viṣṇu, his images were started to be adored by the people and for that purpose the *Śilpaśāstras* prescribed the iconographic features of such images. The text of *Vaikhanaśāgama* prescribes the mode of grouping the main images of Viṣṇu as standing, seated and reclining. Most of them are shown in one or the other of these poses. The other basis of the classification is the *yoga*, *bhoga*, *vīra* and *abhisarikā* groups which are seldom found.

The most important aspect of Viṣṇu had been the concept of his incarnations who were quite popular in the Purāṇic period. Though the number of these incarnations were multiplied quite often, but the most important of them were considered to be ten, though the number varies quite often in the texts. These incarnations of Viṣṇu are classified as under—

- (i) Divine incarnations—Varāha (boar), Nṛsiṃha (Man-lion).
- (ii) Human—Dattātreya, Mādhātṛi, Paraśurāma, Rāma, Vedavyāsa, Kṛṣṇa, Kalki.

Viṣṇu of the Vedic times, who is rarely described as having four arms in the Vedic literature was adopted in the subsequent times as a powerful god, having four hands holding the attributes of conch, disc, club and a lotus and was also depicted in the Indian plastic art quite often. In due course of time his iconography was also developed. The texts like *Devatāmūrtiprakaraṇam*, *Aparājitapṛccha*, *Amśubhedāgama*, *Pūrvakaraṇāgama* and other *Śilpaśāstras* were quite vocal on the subject (Refer to Pls. 1-3).

(ii) Viṣṇu as Trivikrama or Vāmana

Vāmana, the sixth incarnation of Viṣṇu is of clear Vedic affiliation, for the entire mythology about it grew out by stages of Āditya Viṣṇu's attributive epithet of Trivikrama. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (1.2.5.1 ff) version of the story about the agreement between the gods and the demons during this overlordship of the universe that the latter would only grant to the former that portion of it, which would be covered by the recumbent figure of Viṣṇu, belongs to the intermediate stage

in its development. It is expressly laid down there that when Viṣṇu, the dwarf, among the gods, actually lay down, his body covered the whole of the universe as he was identical with universe or sacrifice and the *asuras* had to part with the earth according to the previous stipulation. The *Rgveda* speaks on the subject as follows—

- (i) इदं विष्णु विचक्र मे त्रेधानिदधे पदम्।
समूलहमहस्य पांसुरे। —*Rgveda*, I.22.17
- (ii) यः पार्थिवानि विममे रजासि
विचक्रमानस्त्रेधी रुणाय।। —*Ibid.*, I.154.3
- (iii) य इमं दीर्घं प्रयतं सधस्यमेको विममे
त्रिभिरिह मदेभिः।। —*Ibid.*, I.154.3
- (iv) यः पार्थिवानि त्रिभिरद विगामभिः
उरुकमिष्टोरुगायाय।। —*Ibid.*, I.155.4

Rgveda (I.154.2) also brings out the fact that the entire universe is covered by the feet of Viṣṇu—

यस्योरुषु त्रिषु विक्रमेषु अधिक्षियन्ति भुवनानि विश्वा। —*Ibid.*

The same aspect is testified in the *Vājasneyi Samhitā* (23.49) as under—

येषु विष्णु स्त्रिषु पदेषु इष्टः तेषु विश्वं भुवनं माविवेश।।

V.S. Agrawala has found the motif of the Vāmana story in the Vedic symbolism (*Matsya Purāṇa—A Study*, pp. 306-307) of Viṣṇu taking three strides and measuring the three *lokas*. The motif of the three steps of Viṣṇu is repeated in several other hymns of the *Rgveda*. There are two aspects of the divine principle. One as unmanifest called Vāmana and the other as the manifest called Viṣṇu, *Virāṭ*, *Mahat* etc. That which is *Virāṭ*, comprised the three of Viśvabhuvanas. It is the power of Svayambhū who is the same as manifest Vimana or the self-existent centre, which expands as the diameter and the circumference. The law of creation is expressed in the formulas—

- (i) वामने च विष्णु रास, *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, I.2.5.5.
- (ii) सहि वैष्णवे यद् वामनः। *Ibid.*, V.2.5.4.
- (iii) वैष्णवो वामनः। *Ibid.*, XII.2.2.9

The meaning is that Vāmana *Virāṭ* are two aspects of the same divine power, that which is Viṣṇu or dwarf in its source or in the seed *Vaiṣṇava* or *Virāṭa*, i.e., cosmic manifestation in the body or in the cosmic tree. It is the intrinsic power of the manifest centre which expands into the diameter on the basis of which the circumference is ascribed. All the movements of space which became manifest in the diameter abide in the centre and it is only the principle of movement that makes it expand. The centre (*madhya*) is Vāmana whom the Devas or the manifest powers worship मध्ये वामनासीनं सर्वे देवा उपासते। (*Kaṭhapaniṣad*, 5.3). The centre

symbolises the principle of rest (*pratiṣṭhā*) or static (*sthiti*), but when the principle of *rajas* becomes operative, the centre has to expand which becomes manifest in space. This is how the bodies of plants, animals and men, wherever the principle of life functions, are formed as a result of *gati* or movement as exemplified by *kāla* or time. The basic principle is *kāla* (time) i.e., movement of the dynamism. Wherever there is *kāla*, there is growth. *Vāmana* is the symbol of *Aṇu* or the minute aspect and *Virāṭ* is of its universal or cosmic aspect called *Mahat*. It is clearly stated in the story that *Vāmana* or the Dwarf first appears in dwarf form and then changes himself to *Virāṭa* or giant which includes all the dimensional and the temporal extensions of the time and space. According to the *R̥gveda* (I.155.6), Viṣṇu first appears as *Yuvā-kumāra* and then changes to the giant form.

Bali is depicted as an *asura* king, viz., the *āsuric* force which keeps the tendency of manifestation in its grip or coils which is the literal meaning of Bali. After its surrender to *āsuric* forces, the *yajña* of the cosmic fills its course. All growth or manifestation is *yajña* in which the divine power unfolds itself in Matter which is symbolised by the three *lokas* or the three steps of Viṣṇu. The cosmic seed has within its womb the seven mighty principles of creation (*R̥gveda*, I.166.37) viz., mind, life and the fire, material elements which are moved by ordinance of Viṣṇu in order to become differentiated (सप्तार्थं गर्भा धुनस्य रेतः। *R̥gveda*, I.154.37). There is no organic centre in which the ordinance of the three steps of Viṣṇu is not operative. It has many forms, e.g., birth, growth and death or past, present and future.

On the other hand Bloomfield, accepting the theory of Sakapuni opines (*Religion of the Vedas*, p. 189), that the footsteps of Viṣṇu denote the movement of the sun from the early morning to the evening, crossing the noon. The falling of the first ray of the sun on earth at dawn is treated to be the first step of Viṣṇu, slowly the sun rises taking the highest position at noon which stands for the second step and the third step stands for the evening.

The same position holds good in the epics as well as the Purāṇas, besides the classical Sanskrit literature. In due course of time practices of depicting both *Vāmana* and *Trivikrama* in the Indian plastic art gained currency and Viṣṇu came to be projected in both these forms. Gradually the *Śilpaśāstras* also patronised the subject and iconographical features of both the forms were defined by these texts.

(iii) Viṣṇu as Sacrifice

In a passage in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (1.2.5.1-7), Viṣṇu has been adored as the *yajña*. (यज्ञेयं विष्णुं पुरस्कृत्य ईयुः). At the time when the *asuras* agree to give away to *Vāmana*, the land measuring his size, the gods are then immensely delighted. The gods then observed "They have agreed to give us the land equivalent to the place of sacrifice." (महदं नो अदुः यद् यज्ञसम्मित-मदुरीति॥) The *yajña* on the other hand is beyond measure. Therefore all the *lokas* now belong to us. Thereafter, the gods, igniting the fire in the east they went on expanding the *Viṣṇu-yajña*, with different metres. They sanctify the same with *Gāyatrī*, *Trīṣṭubha* and *Jagatī* metres established by them in the south, west and north respectively. Thereafter the *yajña*'s, Viṣṇu

pervades all the three *lokas* of the universe. The equation of *yajña* and Viṣṇu is commonly found in the Brāhmaṇic literature. The term यज्ञो वै विष्णु repeatedly appear in the Brāhmaṇa text. In some passages Viṣṇu has been equated with *yajña*. Keith is of the opinion that though Viṣṇu has not so prominent position in the *R̥gveda*, but in the *Brāhmaṇas* he enjoys quite an important role. The main question is as to why Viṣṇu achieved such a great importance as the lord of the sacrifice in the Brāhmaṇas, when his similar position in the *R̥gveda*, *Yajuh* and *Sāma* is almost unknown. Triveni Prasada Singh speaking on the subject emphasises that Viṣṇu has been equated with the Sun; while the Sun and the fire have been equated in the Vedic literature and ultimately Viṣṇu was equated with fire or the sacrifice as well. He is of the opinion that Viṣṇu was adored in the Vedas and the Purāṇas in the form of Sūrya but in the Brāhmaṇas, Viṣṇu was treated as the god of fire or the *yajña*. The sun on the other hand has also been conceived to be the Vaiśvānara form of Agni, the god of fire.

In the Brāhmaṇa literature there appears an interesting story relating to the equation of Viṣṇu with *yajña*. According to this story, some gods started a *homa* at Kurukṣetra. It was then resolved by the gods that whosoever would be able to know the secret of the *yajña* would be declared to be the best of the gods. Viṣṇu came to know of the secret first of all. As a result of this he achieved the supremacy over the gods. With his mind filled with arrogance, lord Viṣṇu slept under a tree resting his head over the bow. The gods had already become envious of Viṣṇu. They, therefore, invited the white-ants to eat away the bow's cord. In return the white-ants were granted a boon that they would spot the water even in the deserts. Thereafter the white-ants ate away the string of Viṣṇu's bow, as a result of which the cord broke with a thundering sound of the bow and severing the head of Viṣṇu threw it in the sky and was turned into the sun. Indra then reached the spot and placed all the limbs of Viṣṇu with his own body as a result of which the *tattvas* of Viṣṇu, entered the body of Indra, Viṣṇu is therefore known as *yajña* and as such Indra too became like *yajña* or मखवत्. In due course of time Indra came to be known as मघवत् (मघवा=Indra).

देवः ह वै सत्रं निषेदुः। अग्निरिन्द्र सोमो मखो विष्णोर्विश्वेदेवा अन्यत्रं
अश्विन्याम्। तेषां कुरु क्षेत्रं देयं नमसास-ते होचुः यो नः श्रेष्ठो तपसा श्रद्धया
यज्ञेन हुतिभि यज्ञस्यो दूचं पूर्वोऽवगच्छात्। स नः श्रेष्ठो असत्.... तद्विष्णु प्रथमं
प्राप। स देवानां श्रेष्ठो अभवन। स यः स विष्णु यज्ञः सः, स यः स यज्ञः
असौ स आदित्य। तद्धेदं यशो विष्णुर्न शशाक संयन्तम्....। स
तिसृवन्यवादापचक्राम। स घनुरात्तयस्तस्यो। स देवा अनभिधृष्णुवन्तः समन्तं परिण्य
वशन्तं। ता ह वयं ऊचुः.... भो अन्य ज्यामप्यद्यात्.... अन्नाद्य मसं प्रयच्छेम।
अपि धन्वनपो अधिगच्छेत्.... तस्योपपरासृत्य ज्यामषिजक्षुः। तस्यां छिन्नाया धनु
आत्यौ विस्फुरनयौ विष्णोः शिरः प्रविच्छवतुः.... तं देवा अभ्यसृज्यन्त.... एवं
तमिन्द्रः प्रथमं प्राप।....

—Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, 14.1.1-13.

Exactly the same story with some modifications is reproduced in the *Maitrāyaṇī Samhitā*, *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* and *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*. The story of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* happens

to be posterior to all and enshrines several other elements. The account of the *Maitrāyaṇī Samhitā* happens to be the earliest of all, in which the name of Viṣṇu does not appear at all, nor is there any important role assigned to him. The name of Viṣṇu is found replaced with Makha or the *yajña* who himself happens to be a god. All the gods perform the *yajña* collectively with the resolve that the success achieved by any one of the god would be considered to be the achievement of all. Makha received that success but he does not part with the same. But when he finds that the gods were getting ready to forcibly get their shares, he leaves the place with his bow and arrow. The white-ants do their job at the instance of the gods. The head of Makha is severed and is turned into the sun (?) or *Samrajya*. Thereafter Agni, Indra and Vāyu appropriate the first, the central and the lower parts of the body respectively. Though the name of Viṣṇu has not been specifically mentioned in the *Maitrāyaṇī* text, still it is the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* which clearly equates Viṣṇu with *yajña*. Both the bow and arrow are stated to be hands of Makha with his smile lustre of Makha emerges out of his mouth and gets multiplied to hundred times. The gods then re-establish the same in the *yajña*—

देवा वै सत्रमास्त ऋद्धिपरिमितं यशस्कामा। ते अब्रुवन् यन्नः प्रथमं यशः
 ऋच्छात् सर्वेषां नः तत् आसत् इति।.... तेषां मखं वैष्णवं यशः आच्छन्।....
 तेव अपाक्रमात्। तं देवा। अन्वायन् यशः अन्यायन् यशः अवरुत्स्यमानाः॥
 तस्य सव्याद् धनुरजायत दक्षिणादिषवः। सोऽस्म्यत एकं मा सन्तं वहवो न
 अभ्यधविषुः इति॥।....
 —*Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*, 5.1.1-6

In the passage of *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*, referred to above, there is a mention of an important aspect of entrusting the task of joining the severed head of Viṣṇu with the trunk, by the Aśvinikumāras, the divine physicians. This aspect is not found mentioned in other texts earlier. But in this case the gods, after the severing of the head of Makha, entrust the rejoining the head to Aśvinis. The Aśvinis receive an earthen vase and rejoin the severed head. The process of uniting the severed head with the body has also been described in the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* and *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa*—

ते देवा अश्विनौ अब्रुवन् मिषजो वै स्थः। इदं यक्षस्य शिरः प्रतिघत्तम्
 इति॥ तौ अब्रुताम् वरं वृणीमहि ग्रहः एव नौ अत्रापि गृह्यताम्.... तौ एतद्
 यज्ञस्य शिरः प्रत्यधत्ताम् यत् प्रवर्ग्यः। तेन सशीर्ष्णा यज्ञेन यजमाना अव
 आशियोऽरुन्धत। अभि सुवर्गं लोकम् अजयन्। यत् प्रवर्ग्यं प्रविनवित यज्ञस्येव
 तच्छिरः प्रतिवधाति। तेन अशीर्ष्णा यज्ञेन यजमानः अव आशियो रून्धेभि सुवर्गं
 लोकं जयति। तस्मादेव अश्विनं प्रवया इव यत् प्रवर्ग्यः॥

—*Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*, 5.1.7

In the *Rgveda* and the *Yajurveda*, Aśvins have been frequently mentioned as the divine physicians of the gods. Simultaneously, it is also mentioned that they were instrumental in getting the sage Cyavana relieved of his old age besides setting right the legs of Visālā (cf.: *Rgveda*, I.118.6; I.112.10). In the story of the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*, Aśvins have been included taking into consideration their mastery in the surgical feats. However, in the Purāṇic accounts, such feats

are attributed to the divine physicians in large number. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (14.1.1.18), further testifies that the art of rejoining the severed head was learnt by Aśvins from Dadhīci much against the wishes of Indra, who had warned Dadhīci that in case he imparted the knowledge of rejoining the head to anyone else, his head would be severed by Indra. But Aśvinikumāras had a firm resolve to learn the science. They, therefore, reached Dadhīci who informed them about the threat of Indra. Aśvins then said, "We shall just now sever your head replacing it with a horse head and you impart the divine knowledge to us. When Indra comes and cuts off that head, we shall replace it with your original head." It happened exactly like that and Aśvins learned the secret knowledge from Dadhīci. They, therefore, rejoined the head of Viṣṇu with the application of the knowledge acquired from the sage Dadhīci. The same story also is retold in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (2.26).

In the Purāṇic literature too, Viṣṇu is often described as the lord of the *yajñas* or one who bestows the merit of the *yajña* performed by someone. In the *Matsya Purāṇa* (254.10), when Śukra forewarns Bali about the arrival of Viṣṇu in the *yajña* in the form of a dwarf, the demon king felt immensely pleased observing at the same time—

धन्योऽहं कृतपुण्यश्च यन्मे यज्ञपतिः स्वयम्।
यज्ञमम्यास्यतो ब्रह्मन् मतः कोऽन्योऽश्रिकः पुमान्॥

—*Matsya Purāṇa*, 254.10

In chapter 73 of the *Brahma Purāṇa*, the term यज्ञेश has been used for Viṣṇu, besides those of यज्ञवाहन and यज्ञपुरुष—

- | | |
|---|-------|
| (i) नासौ विभो बले सत्यं यज्ञेशो यज्ञवाहनः॥ | 73.32 |
| (ii) यज्ञेशो यज्ञपुरुषश्चन्द्रादित्यौ स्तनान्तरे॥ | 73.42 |

Praising the land of Bharata, the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (2.3.21), declares that the people here adore Viṣṇu who happens to be the lord of the *yajñas*—

पुरुषैर्यज्ञपुरुषो जम्बूद्वीपे सदेज्यते।
यज्ञैर्यज्ञमयो विष्णुः अन्य द्वीपेषु चान्यथा॥

The *Śrīmadbhāgavata Purāṇa* has, on the other hand innumerable such references, connecting Viṣṇu with *yajña* in one or the other form. In the fourth Skanda of the same *Purāṇa*, the conflict between Dakṣa Prajāpati and lord Śiva is projected. Dakṣa denounces Śiva, at the neglect displayed by the latter in honouring him. The *Gaṇas* of Śiva on the other hand denounce Dakṣa for his performing the sacrifice for achieving the material.

Sage Bhṛgu, getting agitated at the denouncing of the Vedic practices by the *Gaṇas* of Śiva, pronounce a curse on them saying, "you are denouncing the Vedic practices established by lord Viṣṇu himself and followed by great sages. Therefore, all of you would become imposters."

ब्रह्म च ब्रह्मणाश्चैव यद्युयं परिनिन्दय।
सेतु विधारणं पुंसामतः पाषण्डमाश्रितः॥

एष एव हि लोकानां शिवः पन्था सनातनः।
यं पूर्वं चानु संतस्थु यत्प्रमानं जनार्दनः॥
तद् ब्रह्म परमं शुद्धं सतां वर्त्म सनातनम्।

—*Śrīmadbhāgavata Purāṇa*, 4.2.30-32

The same text also provides the best description of the sacrificial form of Viṣṇu. Here *yajña* has been treated to be an incarnation of Viṣṇu. Viṣṇu is said to have been born as *Suyajña* from the womb of *Akūti*, the wife of *Prajāpati Ruci*. The name of the wife of *Suyajña* has been given to be *Dakṣiṇā*. With the union of both of them a *Devagaṇa* named *Suyana* was born—

जातो रुचेरजनयत् सुयमान् सुयज्ञः।

आकूति सूनुरमनामय दक्षिणायाम्॥ —*Śrīmadbhāgavata Purāṇa*, 2.7.2

In the fourth Skanda of this *Mahāpurāṇa*, the story of the union of *yajña* and *Dakṣiṇā* has been retold a bit elaborately. *Akūti*, the daughter of *Svayambhū* *Manu* was married with *Prajāpati Ruci* on the condition that he would have the first issue as the adopted son. The son was indeed the incarnation of Viṣṇu, bearing the name as *Yajña*. The daughter's name was *Dakṣiṇā* who happened to be the *anśa* of *Lakṣmī*. The son was brought up by the sage *Svayambhū* himself while the daughter was brought up by *Ruci*. On *Yajña*'s becoming adult, he was married to *Dakṣiṇā*. The marriage satisfied both of them and twelve sons were born to them. (*Ibid.*, 4.1.3-5).

(iv) Viṣṇu as *Yajña-Varāha*

While tracing the literary evidence of *Varāha* in the Indian religious traditions, one has to refer back to the text of the *Rgveda*, in which *Varāha* has been mentioned variously. There is also a casual reference of *Rudra* having been called as a boar of the sky. In a passage in the tenth *Maṇḍala* (X.99.6) the staying of the boar is attributed to *Tṛta*. The animal is also connected with *Soma* (IX.97.7) and *Brāhmaṇaspati* (X.67.7) who is said to have, together with the bulls, the boars and with those perspiring with heat come into the possession of the gods. Elsewhere in the same text (I.61.7, VIII.77.10), mention has been made of a myth in which, Viṣṇu carried away a hundred buffaloes and cooked rice-milk which were granted by or had something to do with a boar called *Emaśā*—

अस्येदु मातु सवनेषु सद्योमहः पितुं पपिवाञ्चञ्चार्वन्नामषाय विष्णुः।

पचतं सहीयान् विधयद्वराहं तिरो अदिमस्ता॥

—*Rgveda*, 1.61.7

(Like the sun extracts the essence from water, grains etc. piercing through the clouds, so the chief warrior could piece through the army. (Here the chief warrior could be Viṣṇu or *Indra*). In the *Rgveda* it is also mentioned that at the instance of *Indra*, *Trivikrama* Viṣṇu carried away a hundred he-buffaloes and rice with milk taking to the terrible form of a boar—

विश्वा इत त विष्णुराभरत् उरुक्रमस्वेषितः।

शतमहिषान् क्षीर पाक मोदनं वराहमिन्द्रं एमुषम्॥ —*Rgveda*, VIII.70.10

Varāha has also been mentioned in the *R̥gveda* in connection with the killing of Vṛtra, an instance of which is quoted here—

अस्य त्रितो न्वोजसा वृधानो विषा वराहमयो अग्रया हन्॥

—*Ibid.*, X.99.6

While commenting over the not so clear passages of the *R̥gveda* (VIII.77.11), Sāyaṇa quotes an instance from the *Caraka Brāhmaṇa* of the *Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda* which has currently disappeared. Dyaddhiveda has quoted it in his *Niti-mañjarī* (verse-129), the commentary of which is quoted hereunder—

विष्णुयज्ञः। स देवेभ्यः आत्मानमन्तरधात्। तमन्यदेवता नाविन्दन इन्द्रस्त्व वेत। सं इन्द्रमब्रवीत को भवानिति। तमिन्द्रः प्रत्यब्रवीत अहमदर्गाणामसुराणां च हन्ता। भवांस्तु कः इति॥ सः अब्रवीत् अहं दुर्गा वा हर्ता त्वं तु यदि दुर्गाणामसुराणां हन्ता ततः अहं वराहो वाममुषः एकविंशत्या पुरामश्मयीनां पारे वसति तस्मिन्सुराणां वसु वाममस्ति। तमिम जहीति तस्येन्द्रष्टाः पूरो भित्वा हृदयमविध्यत्। अधि तत्र यदासीत् तद् विष्णु राहरद इति॥

(The Yajña Viṣṇu hid himself from the gods. Indra was aware of it. When Indra went to Viṣṇu, then the latter asked him as to who he was. Giving his introduction Indra said, "I am the one who destroys the castles and am killer of the demons, besides being a great warrior, but who are you?" Viṣṇu replied, "I can bring things hidden in the castles located in the far off places. In case you are the killer of the demons, then kill the demon beyond the twenty-one mountains, who has stolen the treasure of the gods. Indra killed him and then both of them brought the treasure for the gods.)

Sāyaṇa then interprets that in the first hymn (I.61.7) Viṣṇu points to Indra for the subjugation of Varāha. In the fourth line of the passage Viṣṇu asks Indra for the subjugation of Varāha, but Indra asks Viṣṇu to bring the treasure. The next passage provides the details of the treasure brought by Viṣṇu (*R̥gveda*, VIII.27.10).

The above mentioned passage of the *Caraka Brāhmaṇa* is also found in the *Taittirīya Samhitā* (6.2.4.2) briefly. In this text Yajña taking to the form of Viṣṇu enters the earth and all the gods collectively search for him. Indra crosses over him and both of them talk together. The *asura* dwells beyond the seven mountains and not twenty-one. Indra picks up a bundle of grass and pierces through the hills, killing the *asura* at the same time. Then Viṣṇu in the form of Yajña, brings the Varāha and distributes it among the gods.

यज्ञो देवेभ्यो निलायत विष्णुरूपं कृत्वा स पृथिवीं प्राविशत्। तं देवा हस्तानुत्संरम्यैच्छन् तमिन्द्रः उपर्युपर्यत्यक्रमात् सः अब्रवीत को मा अयम् उपर्युपरि अत्यक्रमीत् इति अहं दुर्गे हन्तेत्यथ सस्त्व मित्यहं दुर्गावा हर्ते किं स अब्रवीत् दुर्गे वै हन्ता अवीचया वराहः अयं वाम मोषः सप्तानां गिरीणां परस्ताद्विद्धं असुराणां विभर्ति तं जहि दुर्गा हन्ता असि इति स दधं पुञ्जीलम् उद्वहा सप्तगिरीन् भित्वा

तमहन्त स। स अन्नहीत दुर्गाद् वा आहर्ता अवोचथा एतमाहरेति तमेभ्यो यज्ञमेव
यज्ञ माहरयत् तद्वित्तं वेद्यमसुराणाम् अविन्दन्त।

—*Taittirīya Saṁhitā*, 6.3.4.2.3

In the *Maitrāyaṇī Saṁhitā* of the *Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda* (3.8.1), the above passage appears almost similarly. But the most important aspect of the same is that Viṣṇu does not appear in the beginning. Yajña itself disappears from the sight of the gods. Even the birds were unable to approach him. But Indra crossed over them. Thereafter the conversation started. Thereafter, the demon is killed and his treasure is brought back to the gods. At this stage both Yajña and Viṣṇu are equated. In the *Maitrāyaṇī Saṁhitā*, another passage from the *R̥gveda* (VII.66.2) is inserted. The story of the *Kaṭhaka Saṁhitā* (25.2) runs almost parallel to that of the *Maitrāyaṇī Saṁhitā*.

There is a short reference in the *Atharvaveda*, which associates Earth with Varāha which could be treated as the forerunner of the story which had been told in the earlier texts in quite an abstract and abridged form—

मत्त्वं विभ्रती गुरुमृद् भद्रपापस्य निधनं तितिक्षः।
वराहेण पृथिवी संविदाना सूकरस्य जिहीते मृगाय॥

—*Atharvaveda*, XII.1.48

(Bearing the fool, bearing of what is heavy enduring तितिक्षु, the death of the excellent and of the most evil, the earth is concerned with the boar, opens itself to wild boar.)

In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, the story takes an entirely different turn. The theme of the earlier stories hovers round a demon. But in this case a divine force is conceived which works for the welfare of the people and it originates from Prajāpati. In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (1.1.2.11), it is provided that the earth dug up by a boar is said to be used for the making of the vases for the sacrifice. It is also stated therein, initially the earth was of the size of a thumb, which was raised from seabed by a boar named Emūṣa. Varāha in that context was taken to be the form of Prajāpati who also happened to be the performer of *yajña*. The earth so collected is therefore considered to be most suitable for the making of the vases of the sacrifice.

इयती व हयमग्रे पृथिवीआस प्रादेश मात्री।
ताम् एमूष। इति वराह उज्जधान्। सः अस्याः
पति प्रजापति तेन एव एनम् एतत् मिथुनेन
प्रियेण धाम्ना समद्वयति॥

By the time of the Upaniṣads, the story of the Boar incarnation had not developed fully, though the boar is found mentioned in several of the Upaniṣads, some of which are noted here—

- (i) *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (6.10.2)
- (ii) *Kauṣītiki Upaniṣad* (1.2)
- (iii) *Mahānarāyaṇī Upaniṣad* (4.5)
- (iv) *Mukti Upaniṣad* (1.39)

Adverting to the epic literature it may be stated that in the early chapters of the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* (2.110.3-4), it is Brahmā who became boar initially and raised the earth out of the deep ocean creating the whole world—

सर्वं सलिलं मेवासीत्पृथिवीं यत्र निर्मिता ।
ततः समभवद् ब्रह्मा स्वयंभूदैव तैः सह ॥
स वराहस्ततो भूत्वा प्रोज्जहार वसुन्धराम् ॥

It would thus be evident that upto the early stage of the composition of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Brahmā was considered to be the one who assumed the form of a boar and rescued the earth from the deep waters of the ocean. It was possibly at some later stage that the feat was ascribed to Viṣṇu.

In the Vana-parvan of the *Mahābhārata*, Yudhiṣṭhira, the eldest of the Pāṇḍavas, requested the Lomaśa sage to narrate the episode of Varāha incarnation, a brief of which is reproduced here—

“By the terrible increase of the creatures of the Earth (over-population of the Earth), it sank down a hundred *yojana* deep. Being afflicted with pain all over the body and having been deprived of her seasons, by the excessive weight on her, she sought the protection of the foremost of the deities named Nara-Nārāyaṇa. She then prayed to him. Hearing her prayer, the lord said, “O Earth, O holder of treasure, O burdened Earth, do not be afraid. I shall act in the way by which you will be relieved of your burden.” Having thus sent away the Earth, adorned with the mountains as his ear-rings, he then became a greatly effulgent boar with one tusk. Causing terror with his red eyes emitting smoke from his blazing lustre, he began to swell in magnitude in that place. He then entered the deep oceanic waters and holding the Earth with his single tusk, the eternal one raised her up to a hundred *yojanas*. When she was thus raised up a great agitation in water was created.”

The same text further goes on to testify (12.43.8), Kṛṣṇa to be great boar, fire and sun. His name Govinda is explained (1.21.12) by the fact that he, as a boar, got hold of the earth. It is further stated therein as to how Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu assuming the form of a roaring boar penetrated into the nether regions and destroyed the *daityas*, *rākṣasas* and the *asuras*, who had become jealous of the prosperity of the gods and oppressed the earth with a heavy load forcing her to drown in the oceanic waters. This version of the story approaches the classical form of Varāha incarnation, introducing Hiraṇyākṣa (13.126.12). Besides the above, the *Mahābhārata* points towards the religious veneration extended to the boar, rising out of the water with the Earth. Lord Viṣṇu then declared (13.206.40), that on seeing such an animal one shall never meet any evil and shall be relieved of all the sins. Ostensibly this points to the adoration of boar, because of the association of the animal with Viṣṇu. But keeping in view that the boar has frequently appeared in the Vedic texts and at times with Viṣṇu, the above declaration possibly points to some ancient form of the adoration of boar.

However, in the north-west recension of the *Mahābhārata*, Viṣṇu's name was introduced in the epic. In this connection two other facts need consideration. Firstly it is the Varāha incarnation which enjoys considerable popularity, being regarded in some Purāṇas as the most important of all the incarnations and immortalised by the Indian sculptors. In the second place, it could be a matter of a mere chance that in the description of the festivities in connection, with Indra's banner, a fertility ceremony par-excellence as related in the *Varāha Purāṇa* should have been referred to. According to this text, when the standard "that the source of vigour is being decorated", raised and brought into the town the king is himself required without breaking the fast to recite some auspicious *mantras*. One of them runs as follows—

"Thou art the unborn... once thou are Viṣṇu, the boar, the primeval Purāṇa, thou art death, the all destroying fire..."

The Purāṇas have their own importance in the development of the Indian religious thought and several of the Purāṇas, especially the *Vaiṣṇava Purāṇa*, speak elaborately about the various incarnations of Viṣṇu, including that of the boar or Varāha. As for example, according to the *Agni Purāṇa* (4.2-3), Hiraṇyākṣa, a great demon after having vanquished the celestials became their lord and settled in their regions. The celestials then repaired to lord Viṣṇu and chanted his glories. He then assuming the form of sacrificial boar (Yajña-Varāha) killed the demon together with all his retinue, protecting the virtues and the gods at the same time—

देवैर्गत्वा स्तुतो विष्णु यज्ञरूपो वराहकः।
अभूतं दानवं हत्वा दैत्यैः सार्धं तु कण्टकम्॥
धर्म देवादि रक्षणा वृतातः सोऽन्तर्दधे हरिः॥

Further in chapter 49.2-3, of the same Purāṇa, the iconographical features of the terrestrial boar have been brought out, according to which he is to be endowed with a human body carrying a *gadā* and other weapons in his arms. The divine conch and the goddess Lakṣmī should be represented as resting over his elbow. The Earth and the serpent Ananta of the nether region should follow his head. The installation of such an image by any person ensures his acquisition of the kingdom and helps him to cross over the ocean of universe. The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (1.4.59-61) clearly associates Nārāyaṇa with the feat of the rescue of the earth from the oceanic waters—

रात्रौ चकार्षे ब्रह्मा नष्टे स्थावर जंगमे।
सुष्यायाम्भसि यस्त तस्मान्नारायण इति स्मृतः॥
शर्वयन्ते प्रबुद्धोवै दृष्ट्वा शून्यं चराचरम्।
स्रष्टुं तदा मति चक्रे ब्रह्मा ब्रह्मविदां वरः॥
उदकै राप्लुतां क्ष्मा तां समादाय सनातनः।
पूर्वं वत्स्थापयामास वराहं रूपमाश्रितः॥

The Purāṇas, however, describe the following forms of Varāha—

- (i) Ādi-Varāha or Bhū-Varāha
- (ii) Yajña-Varāha

- (iii) Mahā-Varāha
- (iv) Pralaya-Varāha
- (v) Nṛ-Vraha.

The Varāha form of Viṣṇu has been dominating the Indian religious art from quite an early date. The earliest specimens of the god are found during the Śuṅga period in the 2nd-1st century BC. In fact Varāha has been depicted in Indian plastic art in anthropomorphic form of a boar as well as the hybrid form of boar's head placed over a human body.

(v) **Viṣṇu in Matsya Form**

Like Varāha, there are two more incarnations viz., the Matsya (fish) and Kūrma (tortoise), the genesis of whom could be traced in the Vedic literature. Both of them were earlier associated with Prajāpati, but subsequently the all pervading Viṣṇu over-shadowed them. Matsya is connected with the flood legend, which had been popular not only in the early Indian literature, but had been known in several countries of the world. A few such instances are given below—

- (i) *Hero surviving with a women*—Greece, Iceland, Greenland, Annals of Assam, Lapchas of Sikkim, Entago Islands of Indonesia, Betaks of Sumatra, Benua Jakun of Malaya Peninsula, in this type of the flood legend.
- (ii) *The male or the female surviving alone—counterpart appearing later*—The projection of this idea is available in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, besides the literature of Poland, Islands of Micronesia (female); Engano Islands of Indonesia (female).
- (iii) *Incestuous-relation for recreation*—The text of *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, the legends of the Bhils of Central India, Amis of Formosa and Chiriguano of Bolivia in South America include such references.
- (iv) *Survival of a number of persons in pairs or a group of persons*—Such references are variously found in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas* besides the legends of Babylonia, Egypt, Hebrew, Celebes, etc.
- (v) *Survival of a hero, a couple or a group with many other things for re-creation i.e., seeds of every sort, various animals, birds etc. in pairs*—*Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas*, besides the folk-tales of Persia, Hebrew, Welsh, Bahners of Cochin, China, New Guinea, Melanesias of New Hebrides, Mexico.
- (vi) *Flood warning given by animals or divine beings*—The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, *Mahābhārata*, *Purāṇas*, besides the folk-tales of Greece, Bhils of Central India and Indians of North America have such tales in their legends.

It is almost a universal belief that before the beginning of the creation, there was nothing but a vast expanse of waters shrouded in darkness. In the hymns of the creation in the *R̥gveda* (X.129) a question is raised as to whether the fathomless waters existed before the creation of the world and the answer is given in the affirmative. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (II.1.64), also speaks that verily in the beginning the universe was nothing but waters. The epic of *Rāmāyaṇa*

(III.110.3-4) too testifies that there was nothing else but water in the beginning and the earth was drowned in it. In Greece too, according to Homer, the prime component of the universe was ocean; water and earth according to Hironymus and Hellenicus; Water and slime according to Athenagoras and water alone according to Thales. The folk tales of several countries of the world speak on similar lines with slight variations here and there. This is possibly the only story which is identical in nature in the Indian as well as the Semetic folk tales about the origin of the universe.

The story of the incarnation of Matsya has been contained initially in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, according to which the servants of Manu, the son of Vivasvān, brought some water in a vase for sipping it. As soon as Manu poured the water over his palm, a small fish appeared in the water held in the palm of Manu. The fish then prayed, "You better bring me up, and I in turn shall protect you." Manu asked, "How will you protect me?" The fish said, "There would be a terrific deluge in the near future, which will destroy the entire universe. I shall save you from the flood waters, together with your people". Manu then asked her, "How can you be saved?" The fish said, "When we are small, we have to face many enemies. The big fish eats away the small fish. Presently you keep me in an earthen vase. When I grow in size, then you dig up a pit and put me there. Thereafter when I grow further you can release me in the ocean. Thereafter no one would be able to destroy me." Manu did so and when the fish was released in the waters of the ocean, the fish revealed to Manu, the time for the deluge and advised him to get ready with a boat. Thereafter she disappeared. At the time of the deluge, Manu with his followers boarded the boat. The fish then appeared in the form of a big fish with a horn. Manu then tied the string of the boat with the horn of the fish. She drove the boat through the waters to the northern direction. She then asked Manu to tie up the cord of the boat to a tree. She then said to Manu, "You come down as soon as the flood waters subside. The floods destroyed all the people but Manu alone could be saved from the floods. After the subsiding of the water, Manu came down and he performed *homa* while standing in the water. After one year a girl named Idā was born out of the *yajña*. She then said to Manu, "You perform the *yajña* with me. You will achieve a home, animals and all other things desired by you". Manu did so and all the people were created thereafter. In the next passage, the animals have been equated with Idā—

मनवे ह वै प्रातः अवेनेयम् उदकम् आजहुः।तस्यावनेनिजानस्य मत्स्यः
पाणी आपेदे। स हास्मै वाचमुवाद 'बिभृहि मा, पारयिष्यामि त्वा' इति। 'कस्मान्मा
पारयिष्यसि'? इति। औषः इमाः सर्वाः प्रजा निर्वोढा, ततस्त्वा पारयितास्मि' इति।
'कथं ते भृति' रिति। स होवाचयावद् वै क्षुल्लका भवामः, वद्मी वै नः
तावत् नाष्टा भवति। उत मत्स्य एव मत्स्यं गिलति। कुम्भ्यां माग्रे बिभरासि।
स यदा तामतिवद्धै, अथ कर्षू खात्वा तस्यां मा बिभरासि। स यदा तामतिवद्धै
अथ मा समुद्रमध्यवहरासि तर्हि वा अतिनाष्ट्री भवितास्मि'। शशवद् ह झष आस।
स हि ज्येष्ठं वर्धते। 'अथ इतिथीं समां तदौष आगन्ता, तन्मा नावम् उपकल्प्य
उपासासै। स औष उत्थिते नायम् आपद्यासै। ततस्त्वा पारयितास्मि'। तमेवं भूत्वा

समुद्रमभ्यवजहार। स यतिथीं तत्समां परिदिदेश ततिथीं समां नावम् उपकल्प्य
उपासां-चक्रे। स औष उत्थिते नावमापेदे। तं स मत्स्य उपन्यापुप्लुवे। तस्य शृगे
नावः पाशं प्रतिमुमोच। तेनैतमुत्तरं गिरिम् अतिदुद्राव। स होवाच 'अपीपर वै त्वा,
वृक्षे नावं प्रतिबध्नीष्व। तं तु त्वा मा गिरौ सन्तमुदकमन्तश्छैत्सीत्। यावद् यावद्
उदकं समवायात् तावत् तावद् अन्ववसर्पासि' इति।औघो ह ताः सर्वाः प्रजाः
निरुवाह। अथेह मनुरेवैकः परिशिशिषे'।

—Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, 1.8.1.1-6

The same story has been repeated with slight modifications in the *Mahābhārata* (Vana-parvan, Ch. 187). In this case it has been clearly mentioned that the fish represented the form of Prajāpati or Brahmā. In this case the fish got into the palm of the Manu, when he was about to take a bath over the bank of the river Cerni. The small fish then humbly prays Manu to save her—

भगवन् क्षुद्रमत्स्योऽस्मि बलवद्भ्यो भयं मम।

मत्स्येभ्यो हि ततो मां त्वं त्रातुमर्हसि सुव्रत॥

—Vana-parvan, 187.7.

Manu then places the small fish into his *kamaṇḍalu* but she grows so rapidly that an earthen pot, a tank and a river are found to be too small to accommodate her. Ultimately Manu releases her in the ocean—

यदा समुद्रे प्रक्षिप्तः स मत्स्यो मनुना तदा।

तत एनमिवं वाक्यं स्मयमान इवाब्रीत्॥126॥

भगवन् हि कृता रक्षा त्वया सर्वा विशेषतः।

प्राप्तकालं तु यत्कार्यं तत् त्वया श्रूयतां मम॥127॥

अचिराद् भगवन् भौममिदं स्थावरजंगमम्।

सर्वमेव महाभाग प्रलयं वै गमिष्यति॥128॥

त्रसानां स्थावराणां च यच्चेद्भ्रं यच्च नेङ्गति।

तस्य सर्वस्य सम्प्राप्तः कालः परमदारुणः॥130॥

Thereafter the fish asks Manu to arrange for a strong boat and revealing the time of the deluge and desires Manu, that on that particular day, he should collect seeds of all the *oṣadhis* (plants) and cereals together with the Saptarṣis in the boat. She further tells him that she would appear in the form of a great horned fish and shall lead him to safety—

नौश्च कारयितव्या ते दृढा युक्तवटारका।

तत्र सप्तर्षिभिः सार्द्धम् आरुहेया महामुने।

आगमिष्याम्यहं शृंगी विज्ञेयस्तेन तापस॥130, 31॥

It happens exactly the same way. The ocean on that date crosses all its limitations and drowns the entire earth. The boat of Manu floats over the flood waters. He remembers the fish who arrives there. Matsya leads him to Himālaya and asks him to tie the cord of his boat with a mountain—

ततो हिमवतः शृंगं मत्परं भरतर्षभ।
 तत्राकर्षत् ततो नावं स मत्स्यः कुरुनन्दन॥१४८॥
 अथाब्रवीत् तदा मत्स्यस्तान् ऋषीन् प्रहसन् शनैः।
 अस्मिन् हिमवतः शृंगे नावं बध्नीत मा चिरम्॥१४९॥

Thereafter the fish introduces himself to Manu saying, "I am Prajāpati named Brahmā. There is no one better than me on earth. I have saved the lives of all of you taking to the form of the fish because the universe is created by Manu. The glory of Manu will go on increasing with the performing of the *tapas*—

अहं प्रजापतिर्ब्रह्मा मत्परं नाधिगम्यते।
 मत्स्यरूपेण यूयं च मयास्मान्मोचिता भयात्॥१५२॥
 मनुना च प्रजाः सर्वाः सदेवासुरमानुषाः।
 स्रष्टव्या सर्वलोकाश्च यच्चेद्भ्यं यच्च नेद्भति॥१५३॥
 तपसा चापि तीव्रेण प्रतिभास्य भविष्यति।
 मत्प्रसादात् प्रजासर्गे न च मोहं गमिष्यति॥१५४॥

It has already been pointed out earlier that the Vedic texts co-relate Viṣṇu with the boar in one form or the other but in the text of *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, the fish incarnation is in no way connected with Viṣṇu, that in the subsequent literature, he was considered to be one of the ten incarnations of Viṣṇu.

Evidently Viṣṇu has no place in the episode. The story remains complete in itself besides maintaining continuity. Evidently Prajāpati Manu is helped by Brahmā, who makes all the effort. But Brahmā was in no way associated with the incarnation, which aspect is associated with Viṣṇu alone, in the Indian religious thought. In the Purāṇic texts, the responsibility of the protection of the creatures of the universe was made to rest upon lord Viṣṇu. This could be the reason that in the *Bhagavadgītā*, he emphatically declares—

यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत।
 अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम्॥
 परित्राणाय साधूनां विनाशाय च दुष्कृताम्।
 धर्मं संस्थापनार्थाय सम्भवामि युगे युगे॥

—*Bhagavadgītā*, 4.7-8

Evidently because of the ever expanding influence of Vaiṣṇavism, the story developed a leaning towards Viṣṇu as a hero, sidetracking Brahmā at the same time, who in the later religious traditions was conceived to have emerged seated over a lotus emerging from the navel of lord Viṣṇu. This has been a common motif in the Indian plastic art in which in the form of Śeṣāśayi Viṣṇu, Brahmā has been shown emerging from the navel of Viṣṇu.

The story of Matsya incarnation is the main theme of the *Matsya Purāṇa*. Lord Viṣṇu in the form of Matsya delivers a discourse to Manu, which later appears in the *Matsya Purāṇa*. In

this *Purāṇa*, Viṣṇu alone appears in the form of Matsya and not Brahmā. This aspect is highlighted in several of the verses in this *Purāṇa* some of which are as under—

- (i) ज्ञातस्त्वं मत्स्यरूपेण मां खेदयसि केशव।
हृषीकेश जगन्नाथ जगद्धाम नमोऽस्तु ते॥1.28॥
- (ii) एवमुक्तो मनुस्तेन पप्रच्छ मधुसूदनम्॥1.1॥
काले यथोक्ते संजाते वासुदेवमुखोदगते।
- (iii) शृंगी प्रादुर्बभूवाथ मत्स्यरूपी जनार्दनः॥2.17॥
तदेवैकार्णवे तस्मिन् मनुः पप्रच्छ केशवम्॥2.21॥
- (iv) कस्माच्च भगवान् विष्णुर्मत्स्यरूपत्वमाश्रितः॥1.8॥ आदि।

It may, however, be stated in this connection, that the association of Brahmā with the episode has not been lost-sight-of in the *Matsya Purāṇa*. It is mentioned in the text that initially Manu pleases Brahmā with his *tapas* and asks for a boon for the protection of the universe at the time of deluge. It is indeed Brahmā, who grants him a boon that he would be protected by Viṣṇu at the time of the deluge—

वरं वृणीष्व प्रोवाच प्रीतः स कमलासनः।
एवमुक्तोऽब्रवीद्राजा प्रणम्य स पितासहम्।
भूतग्रामस्य सर्वस्व स्थावरस्य चरस्य च।
भवेयं रक्षमायासं प्रलभे समुपस्थिते॥1.14, 16॥

The name of Brahmā, however, has been completely deleted in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in which the same story is retold with some modifications. The story starts with a question from Parikṣita, the main listener of the *Purāṇa*. Accordingly a question is raised by Parikṣita, as to why lord Viṣṇu took to the form of a fish. At this Śukadeva replied, "For the protection of the cows, Brāhmaṇas, the gods and noble people, lord Viṣṇu has to resort to taking birth in one or the other form."

गोविप्रसुरसाधूनां छन्दसामपि चेश्वरः।
रक्षामिच्छंस्तनूर्धत्ते धर्मस्यार्थं तथैव हि॥8.24.5॥

In the text of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (8.24.8-9), there is another reason for the incarnation of Viṣṇu in the form of fish. It has been brought out in this text that a demon named Hayagrīva had stolen away the Vedas, which emerged out of the nostrils of Brahmā, when he was asleep. The demon then entered the netherworld with the Vedas. In order to get back the Vedas lord Viṣṇu had to take to the form of a fish to enable him to freely move into the oceanic waters.

कालेनागतनिद्रस्य धातुः शिशयिषोर्बली।
मुखतो निःसृतान् वेदान् हयग्रीवोऽन्तिकेऽहरत्॥
ज्ञात्वा तद् दानवेन्द्रस्य हयग्रीवस्य चेष्टितम्।
दधार शफरीरूपं भगवान् हरिरीश्वरः॥8.24.8॥

The prime character of the story of the *Śrīmadbhāgavata Purāṇa* happens to be Satyavrata, the lord of Dravīḍas, who happened to be the son of Sraddhādeva. Viṣṇu in the form of a small fish reached the royal priest Satyavrata. Thereafter the story moves on similar lines, but the single horned fish does not lead Satyavrata to the Himālayas. Instead, lord Viṣṇu in the form of a fish floats over the waters with the boat till the flood continues, making discourses on several religious topics. After the receding of the flood waters, when Brahmā woke up, then Viṣṇu in the form of Matsya, kills Hayagrīva, snatches away the Vedas from the demon and hands them over to Brahmā—

अतीतप्रलयापाय र्त्थाय च वेदसे।

हत्वासुरं हयग्रीवं वेदान् प्रत्याहरद्धरिः॥ —*Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, 8.24.57

The same text also testifies that the main reason for the incarnation of lord Viṣṇu in the form of Matsya had been to rescue the Vedas, after killing the demon Hayagrīva—

प्रलयपयसि धातुः सुप्तशक्तेर्मुखेभ्यः

श्रुतिगण मय नीतं प्रत्युपावत्त हत्वा।

दितिजमकथ यद्यो ब्रह्म सत्यव्रतानां

तमहमखिल हेतुं जिह्ममीनं नतोऽस्मि॥

In the *Mahābhārata*, Prajāpati is stated to have taken to the form of fish in order to save Manu. The composer of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, possibly did not consider it worthwhile for Viṣṇu to incarnate on earth for this small job. He, therefore, added to the story another episode of the recovery of the Vedas. It may be recalled here that the story of the loss of the Vedas is also available even in the *Mahābhārata*, but it is in modified form. In this case two demons named Madhu and Kaiṭabha had carried the Vedas to the nether world. Viṣṇu, therefore, had to take to the form of Hayagrīva (a human with horse head) in order to recover the Vedas killing the demons at the same time (*Mahābhārata*, Śānti-parvan, 347.1-71). The Hayagrīva incarnation of Viṣṇu is therefore connected with the rescue of the Vedas and not for the killing of the demons—Madhu and Kaiṭabha.

(vi) Viṣṇu as Kūrma

The Hindu religious thought adores the tortoise form of Viṣṇu, though his popularity is somewhat subdued and the only reason for his incarnation had been to serve as a base to the Mandarācala mountain which was made to serve as the churning rod for the churning of the ocean. There has been no other usage of this form of Viṣṇu. The turning of Viṣṇu, the greatest energy of the universe into the form of tortoise, has been mentioned initially in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (4.5.1.5)—

स यत् कूर्मो नाम। एतद्वै रूपं कृत्वा प्रजापतिः प्रजाः असृजत्।

यदसृजत् अकरोत् तत्, यदकरोत् तस्मात् कूर्मः। कश्यपो वै कूर्मः।

तस्मादाहुः सर्वाः प्रजाः काश्यप्य इति।

(Prajāpati had created the universe with the help of the tortoise. Since he had created the universe taking to this form, that is why it was called Kūrma. The other name

of Kūrma is Kaśyapa. This is the reason why the creatures of the universe are called the sons of Kaśyapa.)

In the Purāṇas, all the people are considered to be the sons of Kaśyapa, who had thirteen wives, who were the daughters of Dakṣa Prajāpati. Each one of the wives gave birth to different types of creatures. Diti thus became the mother of demons and Aditi became the mother of the gods; Vinatā was the mother of birds and Kadrū was the mother of serpents. In the classical Sanskrit, the developed form of Kaśyapa was also used for Kūrma or the tortoise.

Kūrma happens to be one of the earliest form of Prajāpati. Since there was water everywhere in the universe, Prajāpati was, therefore, required to take to some form by which he could freely move in the oceanic waters. Strictly speaking, tortoise is not an aquatic animal, but it enjoys an important place in the performing of the religious ceremonies. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (7.5.1.1. and 6.1.1.12) prescribes that Kūrma is the essence of the earth and the other *lokas*, which emerges from them when they are submerged in the water. Kūrma is further described to be the soul of the three worlds—

रसो वै कूर्मः। यो वै स एषां लोकानाम् अप्सु प्रविद्धानां पराङ् रसः
अप्रत्यक्षरत् स एष कूर्मः। यावानु वै रसः तावानात्मा। स एष इम एव लोकाः॥

—7.5.1.1

सोऽकामयत आभ्यः अद्भ्यः अधि इमां प्रजनयेयम् इति। तां संक्लिश्य
अप्सु प्राविष्यत्। तस्यै य पराङ् रसः अत्यक्षरत्। स कूर्मः अभवत्॥

—6.1.1.12

There is another reason for Kūrma, the soul of the three worlds, to enjoy the place of importance. The body of the tortoise is always covered with a big shield. This shield represents the sky, since it covers everything like the sky. The lower part represents the earth. As all the *lokas* are covered under the earth and the sky, similarly the body of tortoise is formed in the same manner.

तस्य यदधरं कपालम्। अयं स लोकः। तत्प्रतिष्ठितमिव भवति। प्रतिष्ठित
इव ह्ययं लोकः। अथ यदुत्तरम्, सा द्यौः। तद् व्यवगृहीतान्तमिव भवति।
व्यवगृहीतान्तेव हि द्यौः। अथ यदन्तरा, तदन्तरिक्षम् स एष इम एव लोकाः।

—*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 7.5.1.2

The importance of Kūrma or tortoise in the formation of the ideology of the *Brāhmaṇas* and the *Āraṇyakas* would be apparent from the following passage from the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*, which contains a small conversation between Prajāpati and Kūrma, about the creation of the universe. It is stated therein that during the performing of the *tapas* by Prajāpati with the intention of creating the universe his essence fell into the oceanic waters and took to the form of a tortoise. Prajāpati then declares to the tortoise, “You have been born of my skin and flesh.” The tortoise refuted it and said, “I was born ahead of you. That is why I am called Puruṣa.” Kūrma happens to be the same who is called as having a thousand heads, a thousand eyes and

a thousand feet." Prajāpati then accepting his superiority asks him to resort to creation. Thereafter Kūrma resorts to creating the universe.

यो रसः सः अपाम् इति। अन्तरतः कूर्मभूतं सर्पन्तं तमब्रवीत्।
मम वै त्वङ्मांसासमभूत् नेत्यब्रवीत्। पूर्वमेवाहम् इह आराम् इति।
तत्पुरुषस्य पुरुषत्वम्। सहस्रशीर्षा पुरुषः। सहस्राक्षः सहस्रपात्।
भूत्वोदतिष्ठत्। तमब्रवीत्। त्वं वै पूर्वं समभूः त्वमिदं पूर्वं कुरुष्व इति।

—*Taittiriya Āraṇyaka*, 1.23.3,4

Usually the Vedic and post-Vedic literature refers to Kūrma in quite a different way, though his sanctity is maintained in one form or the other. But the *Mahābhārata* assigns a different role to him resulting in his achieving the form of the incarnation of Viṣṇu. In the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas*, the episode of the churning of the ocean is quite frequently mentioned. In this churning feat, the churning rod, the rope, and the base of the churning rod was required. While the mountain Mandarācala was made to serve by the gods as the churning rod and the serpent Vāsuki as the rope for the churning of the ocean, something was needed to serve as the base over which the churning rod was required to rotate. The requirement was supplied by lord Viṣṇu, who offered to serve as the tortoise to bear the load of the mountain Mandarācala. The *Purāṇas* also describe the role of Kūrma in a different way as well. For example the *Matsya Purāṇa* (246.75), points out that at the time of the lifting of the Earth by Varāha, he rested one of his foot over the back of Kūrma and moved on—

कूर्मं पृष्ठे पदं न्यस्य निश्चक्राम रसातलात्॥

While defining the iconographical features of the images of Varāha, it has been mentioned in the *Matsya Purāṇa* (259.30), that one foot of Varāha should be placed over Kūrma and the other over the head of an elephant—

कूर्मोपरि तथा पादमेकं नागेन्द्रमूर्धनि।
संस्तूयमानो लोकेशैः समन्तात् परिकल्पयेत्॥

In chapter 58 of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, while describing the *Bhuvana-vinyāsa*, it is believed that the Earth rests over a tortoise. The belief of the tortoise serving as the base for the Earth is not found in India, but the ancient beliefs of the other countries of the world like China, Japan, America, also speak on similar lines. In the *Mahābhārata* is mentioned that as a result of the churning, when the ocean started sinking then the gods and the demons collectively approached the tortoise to serve as a base for the mountain—

ऊचुश्च कूर्मराजानमकूपारे सुरासुराः।
अधिष्ठानं गिरेरस्य भवान् भवितुमर्हति॥
कूर्मेण तू तथेत्युक्त्वा पृष्ठमस्य समर्पितम्।
तं शैलं तस्य पृष्ठस्थं वज्रेणेन्द्रो न्यपीडयत्॥

—*Mahābhārata*, Vana-parvan, 18.11-12

There is a school of thought according to which some of the Purāṇas do not consider Kūrma, who served as a base for the mountain at the time of the churning of the ocean and in this connection it is pointed out that in chapter 148 of the *Matsya Purāṇa*, Kūrma was invited to undertake the job when he specifically agreed to do so. For this purpose both Kūrma and serpent Śeṣa arrive at the surface of the ocean—

कल्प्यतां नेत्रकार्ये यः शक्तः स्याद् वेष्टने मम।
ततस्तु निर्गतौ देवौ कूर्मशेषौ महाबलौ॥248.26॥

Kūrma then declares his competence that when he can carry the entire earth over his back then why should he bother about the mountain Mandarācala which could be like a ball to him.

त्रैलोक्यधारणेनापि न ग्लानिर्मम जायते।
किमु मन्दरकात् क्षुद्रात् घुटिकासनिभादिह॥248.28॥

Saying this Kūrma then takes over the load of Mandarācala over his back. But evidently the task of carrying Mandarācala over its back cannot be performed by an ordinary tortoise. It has, therefore, been testified in the *Matsya Purāṇa* (248.27) that Kūrma and Śeṣanāga happen to possess a fourth *amśa* of Viṣṇu as a result of which Kūrma could carry the earth.

विष्णोर्भागौ चतुर्थांशद् धरण्या धारणे स्थितौ।

With the above declaration of the *Matsya Purāṇa* the stage for accepting Kūrma as the incarnation of Viṣṇu is set, which was further developed in other *Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas*.

In the Bāla-kāṇḍa of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (chapter 46) also deals with the churning of the ocean. In the Southern recension of the epic the gods and the demons approach Viṣṇu that he should serve as the base of the Mandarācala mountain taking to the form of tortoise—

ततो देवासुरा सर्वे ममन्थू रघुनन्दन।
प्रविवेशान पाताल मन्थानः पर्वतोत्तमः॥
ततो देवाः सगन्धर्वास्तुष्टुवुमधुसूदनम्।
त्वं गतिः सर्वभूतानां विशेषेण दिवौकसाम्॥
पालयास्मान् महाबाहो गिरिमुद्धर्तुमर्हसि।
इति श्रुत्वा हृषीकेशः कामठं रूपमास्थितः।
पर्वतं पृष्ठतः शिरये तत्रोदधौ हरिः॥

—*Rāmāyaṇa*, Bāla-Kāṇḍa, 45.27-30

The *Śrīmadbhāgavata Purāṇa* also testifies that both demons and the gods started churning the ocean quite enthusiastically, but while churning Mandarācala was submerged in water. All the gods witnessing their efforts going waste were disgusted. Then at the instance of Gaṇeśa, Viṣṇu took to the form of a gigantic tortoise and entered the waters serving at the base of the mountain, preventing it from sinking. At that point of time his back was expanded to several lakhs of *yojanas* and appeared like an island in the ocean. The gigantic Mandarācala then started rotating over the back of the tortoise, who felt as if someone was rubbing his back.

विलोक्य विघ्नेशविधिं तदेश्वरो, दुरन्तवीर्योऽवितथाभिसन्धिः।
 कृत्वा वपुः काच्छपमद्भुतं महत् प्रविश्य तोयं गिरिमुज्जहार॥
 तमुत्थितं वीक्ष्य कुलाचलं पुनः समुत्थिता निर्मथितुं सुरासुराः।
 दधार पृष्ठेन सलक्षयोजनप्रस्तारिणा द्वीप इवापरो महान्॥
 सुरासुरेन्द्रैर्भुजवीर्यवेपितं परिभ्रमन्तं गिरिमंगपृष्ठतः।
 विभ्रत् तदावर्तनमादिच्छपो मेनेऽङ्गकण्डूयनमप्रमेयः॥

—*Śrīmadbhāgavata Purāṇa*, 7.8.8, 9, 10

(vii) Viṣṇu as Nṛsiṃha

Out of the ten incarnations of Viṣṇu, the one of Nṛsiṃha is not to be found in the early Vedic literature. The mention of this incarnation is found in the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* (10.1.7)—

वज्रनखाय विद्महे तीक्ष्णदंष्ट्राय धीमहि।
 तन्नो नारसिंहः प्रचोदयात्॥

This passage is considered to be the later addition of the text, but scholars have given it a date of the third century BC. However, the genesis of this incarnation of Viṣṇu is shrouded in mystery. It may, however, be recalled that in the ancient Egyptian mythology, there exists a composite form with the face of a lioness and the human body commonly known as Sphinx. India, on the other hand, had cultural relations with Egypt, and it could be possible that this Sphinx could have something to do with the concept of Nṛsiṃha in India or vice-versa. Hopkins had been of the opinion that the term Nṛsiṃha was used for Viṣṇu in order to project his superiority, which means the one who happens to be a lion among the humans. But the epithet of Puruṣottama has also been used for Viṣṇu. In the *Mahābhārata*, the epithet of Nṛsiṃha has been used for the best of the people—

सुरषभा ब्राह्मणसत्तमाश्च तथा नृपाद्या नरदेव मुख्या।
 दृष्ट्वा महार्हः क्रतुभि नृसिंहः संत्यज्य देहान् सुगतिं प्रपन्ना॥

—*Mahābhārata*, Śalya-parvan, 53.23

The above reference to Nṛsiṃha has been taken by scholars to be mere mention of the animal of great force to equate the strength of the humans. But this simple reference could hardly be enough to create the stories of Prahlāda, incarnation of Viṣṇu or the killer of Hiranyakaśipu.

The epithet of Nṛsiṃha which is commonly used for anyone among humans, having immense strength, was never connected as such with Viṣṇu. In the *Mahākāvya*s, the epithet of Naraśārdūla was used for all exceptionally valorous persons. As such to conceive Viṣṇu in the form of Nṛsiṃha, must have been based on reasons otherwise than projecting him as the best of the humans. Indeed the passage of the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* is earlier to the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. The *Nṛsiṃha-Uttarāṭhīnī Upaniṣad* and *Nṛsiṃha-Pūrvatāṭhīnī Upaniṣad* were possibly composed a bit later than the early Vedic Upaniṣads, when viewed from their style and the formation of their passages. These texts project the ancient philosophy and Nṛsiṃha has been conceived in them as the *Parama-tattva* besides being the creator of the universe. But the name

of Hiranyakaśipu or the composite form of Nṛsiṃha." Possibly the term Nṛsiṃha has been applied from the strict philosophical or spiritual angle.

The Purāṇas, however, have been more vocal about the personality of Nṛsiṃha and in the *Śrīmadbhāgavata Purāṇa* (7.2.10) and *Harivaṃśa Purāṇa* (3.43), the only aim of the incarnation of Nṛsiṃha had been to kill the sinful demon Hiranyakaśipu who had become envious of Viṣṇu who killed his elder brother named Hiranyākṣa in the form of Varāha. After performing *tapas*, he had got a boon that no one born in humans, gods or animals should be able to kill him. He used to severely torture his son who was devoted to Viṣṇu. Viṣṇu then appeared in the composite form of half human and half lion and killed the demon.

The story of the *Mahābhārata*, however, is silent about Prahlāda and appearing of Viṣṇu in the form of Nṛsiṃha. In chapter 272 of the Vana-parvan, the story has been elaborately told. In this story it has been stated that Viṣṇu once took to the composite form of half human and half lion. He then went to the court of Hiranyakaśipu, who on finding such a strange type of creature rushed towards him with trident held in his hands. Therefore, the powerful Nṛsiṃha, tore him apart with his nails.

पुनरेव महाबाहुरपूर्वा तनुमाश्रितः।
 नरस्य कृत्वार्धतनुं सिंहस्यार्धतनुं प्रभुः॥
 दैत्येन्द्रस्य सभां गत्वा पाणिं संस्पृश्य पाणिना।
 दैत्यानामादिपुरुषः सुरारिदितिनन्दनः॥
 दृष्ट्वा चापूर्वपुरुषं क्रोधात् संरक्तलोचनः।
 शूलोद्यतकरः स्रग्वी (v. 1. धन्दी) हिरण्यकशिपुस्तवा।
 मेघस्तनितनिर्घोषो नीलःप्रचयसन्निभः।
 देवारिदितिजो वीरो नृसिंहं समुपाद्रवत्॥
 समुपेत्य ततस्तीक्ष्णैः मृगेन्द्रेण बलीयसा।
 नारसिंहेन वपुषा वारितः करजैः भृशम्॥

—*Mahābhārata*, Vana-parvan, 272.56-60

In the *Śānti-parvan* of the same epic it is stated that Hiranyakaśipu was the destroyer of the *yajñas* and as such Viṣṇu killed for the benefit of the gods—

नारसिंहं वपुः कृत्वा हिरण्यकशिपुं पुनः।
 सुरकार्ये हनिष्यामि यज्ञं दितिनन्दनम्॥

It is mentioned in the *Matsya Purāṇa* (chapter 160-162), that in *Kṛtayuga*, Hiranyakaśipu, the best of the Daityas performed *tapas* and received a boon from Brahmā—

न देवासुरगन्धर्वा न यक्षोरगराक्षसाः।
 न मानुषाः पिशाचा वा हन्युर्मां देशसत्तम॥
 ऋषयो वा न मां शापैः शपेयुः प्रपितामह।
 यदि मे भगवान् प्रीतो वर एष वृत्तो मया॥

न चास्त्रेण न शस्त्रेण गिरिणा पादपेन च।
न शुष्केण न चार्द्रेण न दिवा न निशाऽथवा॥

—*Matsya Purāṇa*, 160.11-13

Getting intoxicated with the boon, he started torturing the people and the gods approached Viṣṇu for seeking his protection, who assures them and he ultimately goes to the demon king. The son of the monarch came to know about the true identity of Viṣṇu. He, therefore, forwarns his father, but Hiranyakaśipu asks his soldiers to capture Nṛsimha and to kill him. A fierce battle was started in which Nṛsimha kills Hiranyakaśipu.

In the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* (4.55), there is no mention of Prahlāda in the episode of Hiranyakaśipu who is killed by Nṛsimha alongwith other demons—

कृत्वा नृसिंहरूपं च हिरण्यकशिपुर्हतः।
विप्रचित्तिमुखाश्चान्ये दानवा विनिपातिताः॥

In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (7.7.15-16), highlights the reason for Prahlāda becoming a devotee of lord Viṣṇu, according to which Hiranyakaśipu once goes to the Himālaya with his pregnant queen, for performing *tapas*. But Indra kidnapped the pregnant queen with the intention of killing the child in the womb of the queen. But Nārada frees her and keeping her in his *āśrama* educates her on the devotion, divine knowledge and *vairāgya*. These spiritual thoughts influence the child in the womb—

ऋषिः कारुणिकस्तस्याः प्रादाद् उभयमीश्वरः।
धर्मस्य तत्त्वं ज्ञानं च नामप्युद्दिश्य निर्मलम्॥
तत् तु कालस्य दीर्घत्वात् स्त्रीत्वात् मातुस्तिरोदधे।
ऋषिणानुगृहीतं मां नाधुनाप्यजहात् स्मृतिः॥

—*Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, 7.7.16-17

The devotion of Prahlāda for Viṣṇu, the killer of Hiranyākṣa, the elder brother of Hiranyakaśipu, could not be tolerated by the latter. The father warns the son repeatedly, but his warnings have no effect, then the father attempts to kill his son variously—

नदन्तो भैरवान् नादाश्छिन्धि भिन्धीति वादिनः।
आसीनं चाहनञ्जूलैः प्रह्लादं सर्वमर्मसु॥
दिग्गजैर्दन्दशूकैश्च अभिचारावपातनैः।
मायाभिः संनिरोधैश्च गरदानैरभोजनैः॥
हिमवाय्वग्निसलिलैः पर्वताक्रमणैरपि।
न शशाक यदा हन्तुम्॥

—*Ibid.*, 7.5.40, 43, 44

When Hiranyakaśipu was unable to have the child killed through others, he tries to kill the child himself and declares, "Except me, who else is the lord of the universe? Wait a bit, I shall myself cut off your head. Let Viṣṇu who is adored by you arrive here and save you"—

यस्त्वया मन्दभाग्योक्तो मदन्यो जगदीश्वरः।
 क्वासौ यदि स सर्वत्र कस्मात् स्तम्भे न दृश्यते?
 सोऽहं विकल्थमानस्य शिरः कायाद् हरामि ते।
 गोपायस्व हरिस्त्वाद्य यस्ते शरणमीप्सितम्।

—*Ibid.*, 7.8.13-14

The details of the subsequent happenings have been explained in the following verses—

एवं दुरुक्तैर्मुहुरर्दयन् रुषा सुतं महाभागवतं महासुरः।
 खड्गं प्रगृह्योत्पतितो वरासनात् स्तम्भं तताडातिबलं स्वमुष्टिना॥
 तदैव तस्मिन् निनदोऽतिभीषणो बभूव येनाण्डकटाहमस्फुटत्।
 यं वै स्वधिष्योपगतं त्वजादयः श्रुत्वा स्वधामाप्ययभंगं मेनिरे॥
 सत्यं विधातुं निजभृत्यभाषितं व्याप्तिं च भूतेष्वखिलेषु चात्मनः।
 अदृश्यतात्यद्भुतरूपमुद्वहन् स्तम्भे सभायां न मृगं न मानुषम्॥

—*Ibid.*, 7.8.15, 16, 18

The verses 19-39 of the same chapter of the said text describe the terrific form of Nṛsiṃha and the killing of the demon king at his hands.

The story of Nṛsiṃha has travelled to the modern times, and the theme became an important art motif. The *Śilpaśāstras* also described the iconographical features of the Nṛsiṃha (Refer to Pl. 4). According to the *Śilparatna*, the image of Nṛsiṃha is made in a variety of forms viz,—

- (i) Girijā Nṛsiṃha
- (ii) Sthanu Nṛsiṃha
- (iii) Kevala Nṛsiṃha
- (iv) Yanaka Nṛsiṃha

2. OTHER GODS

1. Indra

In the list of the Vedic gods, Indra happens to be the most powerful deity who stands for physical force, strength and valour. His importance in the Vedic deities can be judged from the fact that the maximum number of hymns (nearly 220 of them) are devoted to him. He happens to be one of the most revered one of all the Vedic deities. The personality of Indra is so powerful that it becomes difficult to trace his natural form so much so that the origin of the word Indra also does not throw any proper light on the subject of his real nature. Yask has defined the word Indra in thirteen ways, namely—

- (i) इरां दृणाति। इरा ददाति। इरा दधाति। इरा दारयते। इरां धारयते।
- (ii) इन्द्रवे द्रवति। इन्द्रो रमते।

- (iii) इन्धे भूतानि (तद् यदेनं प्राणैः समैन्धन् तदिन्द्रस्य इन्द्रस्वम् इति विज्ञायते॥)
- (iv) इदं करणात् (इति अग्रयणः)। इदं दर्शनात् (इति ओषमन्यवः)॥
- (v) इन्द्रतेर्वा ऐश्वर्य कर्मणः इदं (शत्रूणां) वारयित्वा आदरयित्वा वा (यज्वानाम्) इति॥ —Nirukta, 10.138

The above definitions could be explained in five different ways. The first one is connected with *irā* or the foodgrains. Being the god of rains, Indra makes the seeds to sprout with the falling of the rains (दृणाति; दारयते॥). The word इरादार is indirectly interpreted to stand for Indra. He is also called as इराद, इराधः or इराध्रः because he produces the grains. These epithets are considered to be the substitutes for Indra. He is called Indudrava (इन्दुद्रवः), because he rushes to consume *Indu* or *Soma*. In the Brāhmaṇa literature, the spirit or the soul also is called Indra. In Sanskrit, the word *Indh* stands for igniting. The spirit or the soul in a man stands for life in man and his temperament, that is why it is equated with Indra. Agrayama and Aupamanyava are of the opinion that the god is called Indra, because he is the creator or the spectator to the creation of the universe, (इदंकरः or इदंदृशः). The root इन्द् stands for riches as well. Since Indra is instrumental in getting his enemies destroyed by means of the enormous riches possessed by him, therefore, he is known by the epithet of इन्द्रदरः.

Evidently the real meaning of the word Indra had disappeared during the time of Yask and as such most of the epithets of Indra were subsequently coined keeping in view the R̥gvedic form of Indra. The terminology like “इरां दृणाति” or “इन्दु द्रवति” could be mentioned in this connection. Durgācārya has tried to explain the various epithets about Indra in the following passage—

विज्ञायते हि परोक्ष प्रिया हि देवाः प्रत्यक्षद्वियः इति।
 सर्वत्रवं देवताभिधेयेषु अभिधानत एव हि देवता
 आत्मनस्तत्त्वमन्तर्णीय व्यवधाय आत्मानम्
 अविदुवा परोक्षीकृत्य नित्यं वर्तते ता तु विद्वांसः
 तदभिधानव्यतिद्वारेण विवृत्य दैवेन चक्षुषा
 मनसोप जात दिव्यदृष्टयो दृष्ट्वा ताद्भाव्यं
 प्रतिपद्यन्ते कृत्स्नः पुरुषार्थः आहितः॥

—Commentary of 10.1.8

On the basis of the commentary of Yask, it would be quite appropriate to believe the origin of the word Indra from the root *Ind* (इन्द्). Pāṇini, on the other hand, speaks on the subject thus—“इदि परमैश्वर्ये” as the root of the word Indra. Indeed the supremacy of the word Indra in the R̥gveda is unparalleled and his greatness in the said text has been established thus—

अहं दां गृणते पूर्व वस्वहं ब्रह्म कृणवं मद्यम् वधनम्॥

—X.49.1

The superiority of Indra is well preserved in the Brāhmaṇa literature and in the Upaniṣadic literature, Indra sometimes has been used for the great soul—*Paramātmā* (*Aitareya Upaniṣad*,

1.11.14). The authority and the popularity of Indra is found on the decline in the epics and the post-epic literature, though his position as the god of gods is indeed maintained.

Max Muller (*Lecture on Language*, II, 438), on the other hand, is of the opinion that the word Indra has been formed from the root इन्द् or विन्द्. As such the name of the god stands derived from the same. McDonald (*Vedic Mythology*, p. 66), also supports the theory of Max Muller. Rode, on the other hand, described the origin of the word Indra from the roots इन् or इन्द in his dictionary. Of the opinion of the above three scholars about Indra, the one expressed by the first two is quite convincing, while the one expressed by Rode is subject to be contested.

Though Indra has been projected in the Vedic literature as the most powerful god, his limbs of the body are also mentioned with frequency in these texts. His head, belly, arms, hands, lips and chin are often mentioned. His face is said to be adorned with moustaches and the beard which moves about after the drinking of the *soma*-juice—

प्रदोधवत् श्वमश्रुषु प्रीणानो याहि हरिभ्यां सुतस्य पोतिम्॥

—*Rgveda*, II.21.17

In hymns (X.112.3) of the *Rgveda*, he has been described as glittering like the sun, and he has the brown hair according to hymn (X.96.8). He has powerful and strong arms which earned him the epithet of being *Vajrabāhu*. With the strength of his illusion he can transform himself into any form (*Rgveda*, VI.47.18).

Dhyu has been described as the father of Indra in the *Rgveda*—

सुवीरस्ते अनिता मन्यत द्यौ इन्द्रस्य कर्ता॥

—IV.17.4

The mother of Indra has been described to be Gṛsti in the *Rgveda* (IV.18.10). This could be the reason that he has been called Gārsteya (in X.11.12). At the time of his birth both Dyāvā-Prthivī shook violently (*Rgveda*, IV.17.2). Soon after his birth, he became a great warrior (*Rgveda*, III.51.8) and the gods then entrusted to him some assignments (*Rgveda*, II.12.1). There is a mention of Indrāṇī, the spouse of Indra in *Rgveda* (I.22.12; II.32.8; X.86.9). Sūkta 86 of the tenth Maṇḍala of the *Rgveda* contains a beautiful dialogue between Indra and Indrāṇī in which the latter complains to the former about the destruction of a beautiful grove by Vṛṣakapi (*Rgveda*, X.86.11). Indrāṇī has also been described as the most virtuous lady in the universe, because her husband has been immortal (*Rgveda*, X.86.11).

Indra uses a golden vehicle as a conveyance, which moves with the speed greater than that of the human mind (*Rgveda*, X.12.2). The chariot is driven by many steeds (*Rgveda*, I.16.1). Indra can fly in the sky like an Eagle (*Rgveda*, VIII.34.2). This chariot has been especially made for the use of Indra.

Vajra is the particular weapon of Indra which produces a sound like the lightning. This *vajra* was created by Tvaṣṭā for the use of Indra. It has two hundred *parvas* and a thousand nails. Indra holds it for performing heroic deeds—

त्वष्टा यद् वज्रं सुकृतं हिरण्मयं सहस्र भृष्टिं त्वया अवतंयत् घत इन्द्रो
नर्यपासि कतवे

—*Rgveda*, I.85.1

Vajra in the above hymn has been described to be of golden complexion, but usually it is considered to be made of Iron (*Rgveda*, I.52.8). It has sharp edges (*Rgveda*, VII.18.18). His other weapons include goad (*Rgveda*, VI.82.3), a net (*Atharvaveda*, VI.8.5) and a bow and an arrow (*Rgveda*, X.103.3).

Of all other Vedic gods, Indra excels in the drinking of the *soma*-juice. The quantity of *soma* consumed by him cannot be consumed by any other human or the god (*Rgveda*, VIII.2.4). This happens to be the beverage, most liked by Indra (*Rgveda*, VIII.4.12). The *soma*-juice is mainly extracted for his sake (*Rgveda*, IX.112.1). Soon after his birth, he took *soma* (*Rgveda*, III.32.10). He drank three measures of *soma*, in order to conserve the energy for getting ready to kill *Vṛtra* (*Rgveda*, V.29.7). In one context, he is stated to have consumed three tanks filled with the *soma*-juice. In the *Rgveda*, the relation between *soma* and Indra is so close, that there is hardly any *Sūkta* of *Soma*, left out. The epithet of *Somapa* has been especially used for Indra (*Rgveda*, II.12.13). It is also mentioned in the *Rgveda*, that Indra once stole *Soma* from *Tvaṣṭā*—

त्वष्टारमिन्द्रो जनुषाभिभूया अमुष्या सोममपिबत् चमूषुः।

—*Rgveda*, III.48.4

The killing of the demons is the first and the foremost duty of Indra and of all the demons, *Vṛtra* happened to be his greatest enemy. As is evident from the name itself, the demon surrounds the water from all the sides. He obstructs the clouds and the rains (*Rgveda*, IV.19.2). The rains are stopped. Indra then destroys the demon with his thunderbolt (*Rgveda*, III.32.4). With the destruction of *Vṛtra*, the water in the streams starts flowing again (*Rgveda*, I.57.6, I.85.9, etc.). After the killing of *Vṛtra*, Indra earned the title of *Vṛtra-han*, which has been used for him in the Vedic texts for more than seventy times. Besides *Vṛtra*; Indra also killed the demons named *Namuci*, *Sambara*, *Bala* and several others. He killed *Namuci* with the foam of the water (*Rgveda*, VIII.14.13). *Maruts* has been stated to be of immense help to Indra in the killing of these demons. Because of his intimate relation with *Maruts*, Indra has been called as *Marutvan*.

All the cities or the mountains, which have been described as the abodes of the demons broadly stand for the clouds. The demons like *Vṛtra* and others concealed themselves in these places. Indra on his part, destroying the cities like clouds, destroyed the demons. Because of the destruction of the cities of demons by Indra, he was also known as 'Puramid' and other such names (*Rgveda*, X.11.10). It has also been testified in the *Rgveda* that Indra stabilised the mountains which had been shaking (II.12.2). It has also been stated that in the earlier times, the mountains used to fly at will, but Indra destroyed them (*Rgveda*, IV.54.5). In the *Maitrāyaṇī Samhitā* (1.17.13), there is a passage, which speaks on the same lines. It records that the mountains had wings earlier, with which they could fly anywhere at will, which shook the earth. Indra therefore cut off their wings. The wings which were cut off were turned into the clouds. This is described to be the reason as to why the clouds even today move towards the mountains, because they were initially attached to them—

प्रजापतेर्वा एतद् ज्येष्ठं लोकं यत्पर्वतः। ते पक्षिण आसन् ते परापातम्
आसत्, यत्र यत्र अकामयन्त। अथ वा इयं तहि शिविरा आसीत्। तेषाम् इन्द्रः

पक्षान् अच्छिनत्। तैः इमाम् अवुंहयः। ये पक्षाः आसन् ते जीमूता अभवन् तस्माद्
एते सपदि पर्वतम् उपप्लवन्ते। योनि हि एवाम् एवः॥

—*Maitrāyaṇī Samhitā*, 1.10.13

Penetrating through the clouds, Indra makes the rains to fall and he also achieves the cows back who had been shut in the mountain caves (*Rgveda*, VI.43.3). In several of the Vedic hymns, the release of the cows which were captivated in the mountain caves, by Indra, has been repeatedly mentioned (cf., *Rgveda*, VIII.45.3; VI.17.5, X.112.8; V.30.4 etc.). The word गो also stands for the sun rays (सर्वे अपि रश्मयो गावः उच्यन्ते। *Nirukta*, 2.5). The other interpretation could be that by covering the sky with the clouds, Vṛtra (clouds) also obstructs the sun-rays. Indra then shattering the clouds, also releases the sun-rays. After the rainfall the clouds usually disappear and as such both the deeds of Indra have been mentioned together. It is also mentioned in the *Rgveda*, that Indra, after killing Vṛtra, made the water to flow in the shape of rains for the benefit of the mankind and established the illustrious sun in the sky—

जघन्वान् उ हरिभिः सम्भूत क्रतविन्द्र वृतं मनुषे गातु यन अपः।
अयच्छया बाह्वो वज्रमायसम् अधारयो दिव्या सूर्य दृशे॥

—*Rgveda*, I.52.8

Indra has also been described as receiving both the light and the water in the *Rgveda* (III.34.8). This could be the reason why Indra has been conceived to be the creator of Uṣā and Sūrya (II.12.7). It is also stated that Indra took out Sūrya from the darkness (*Rgveda*, III.39.5).

Besides the killing of the demons, some other feats are also attributed to Indra in the *Rgveda*. For example, it is stated that Śyena, the eagle had brought *soma*-juice for the use of Indra from heaven to earth (*Rgveda*, III.43.7). In a Śūkta of the *Rgveda* (X.108) there is an interesting story of Paṇi and the cows. Paṇi steals the cows of Indra, who deputed his bitch Saramā trace them out, but she becomes ungrateful and joins Paṇi. Indra then moves following her footsteps and reaches the abode of Paṇi, who is killed at the hands of Indra (*Rgveda*, VI.39.2). A woman named Apālā consumes *soma*-juice with her mouth and is relieved of her skin ailment. Indra then turns her into a beautiful damsel. In some of the stories, Indra is depicted to be bestowing riches on his devotees as well (*Rgveda*, VII.33.3) besides destroying their enemies. Indra is also described to possess great prowess and glory—

यो जात एव प्रथमो मनस्वान् देवो देवान् क्रतुना पर्यभूयत।
यस्य शुष्माद् रोदसी अभ्यसेतां नृमणस्य मद्वा स जनास इन्द्रः॥

—*Rgveda*, II.12.1

The *Rgvedic* text further goes on to testify that no one in the humans or the gods was even born or would be born in future who could be equated with Indra (VII.32.23). No one amongst the gods or the men could ever venture to measure his strength (V.42.6). So great is Indra that he can hold in his fist the entire earth and sky (III.30.5). Even if the earth expands to three times, still, it can't equate with Indra (I.52.11). All the ancient gods have praised his strength and prowess (VII.21.7). All the gods act according to his wishes. Even the gods like Varuṇa, Sūrya

and Rudra too come under his group (I.101.3). The adjectives of Indra too display the extreme prowess possessed by him. He has been called Śacīpati or the lord of Śakti. Even Śakra stands for his possessing great prowess. Besides he has been eulogised by several other names like Tavasū, Amitāuja, Puruhūta, Śatakratu etc. He is also called as Maghavan (Broad minded) (*R̥gveda*, III.13.5) and grants prosperity.

Atharvaveda—All the qualities of Indra, which have been highlighted in the *R̥gveda* have also been repeated in the *Atharvaveda*. He is the bestower of strength, prowess and riches (*Vājasneyī Saṁhitā*, 2.10). He has been conceived as the friend of Maruts, lord of rains, bestower of cereals and good harvest, devoid of pride, strength, protector of the *yajamān* as the holder of *vajra* (3.46; 7.36). Indra requires to consume *soma* in order to collect strength for the waging of the war. He is described as the one, who is instrumental in the increase of Somayaga, immensely valorous and the one who fulfils the desires of the sacrificer (7.39). He has also been known by the name of Parjanya in the *Vājasneyī Saṁhitā* (7.40). The prowess displayed by Indra in the war is quite well known and as such he is frequently invoked for the bestowing of victory (17.42-43). In the later Sanskrit literature Jayanta happens to be the name of the son of Indra. He is known as Jayanta, because of his being always victorious, in the early literature.

Indra is also said to be closely related to the sage Vasiṣṭha. In the *R̥gveda* (VII.18.9-13), Indra serves Sudāsa at the request of the sage Vasiṣṭha. Similarly in the *Vājasneyī Saṁhitā* (20.54), it has been specifically mentioned that Vasiṣṭha adored Indra specifically. The story in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (1.9.1-24), brings out that the sage Durvāsa was enraged when the flower offered by him was disregarded by Indra, uttered—

वसिष्ठाद्यैः दया सारैः स्तोत्रं कुर्वदि भरुच्चकैः।

गर्वं गतोऽसि ये नैव माप्यद्यावमन्यसे।

—*Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, 1.9.22

While emphasising on the special relationship between Indra and Vasiṣṭha, it has been stated in the *Taittirīya Saṁhitā* (3.5.2) that other sage could not see Indra, but Vasiṣṭha saw him. Indra then, imparting the divine knowledge of Brahman to Vasiṣṭha, asked other sages to adore him—

ऋषयो वा इन्द्रं प्रत्यक्षं तापशयन्।

तं वसिष्ठः प्रत्यक्षमपश्यत्।

सः अब्रवीद् ब्राह्मणं ते वेक्ष्यामि॥

Indeed the importance of Indra is quite well preserved in the *Atharvaveda*. In the last Kāṇḍa of this text, nearly hundred and twenty-five Sūktas are connected with Indra. In the other Kāṇḍas too, Indra is found mentioned over 450 times. He has indeed been invoked for the following purposes—

1. For the destruction of the unfaithful lover (VI.138.3)
2. For the destruction of worms in the stomachs of children (V.23.2)
3. To overpower the snakes (X.4.10)
4. For the protection of the pregnant mother (VIII.61.13)

5. For the killing of Vṛtra (IV.24.1,6)
6. For possessing great prowess (I.35.3)
7. Being more powerful than death and is eternal (XII.4.46).

In the *R̥gveda*, Indra has been described to be the creator of the Sun as well as the Sunrays but in the *Atharvaveda*, he has been projected as the Sun himself (17.1). Soon after his rising, he makes his devotees illustrious—

उदिहि उदिहि सूर्य वर्चसा मा उदिहि॥

In another context, Sūrya has been addressed in the form of Indra, has also been called as Puruhūta and has been invoked to bestow welfare—

त्वमिन्द्रासि विश्वजित् पुरुहूतस्त्वमिन्द्र।

त्वमिन्द्र सुहवंस्तोम मेरस्य स नो मृड सुमतौ ते स्याम॥

—*Atharvaveda*, XVII.1.11

In the ninth and the thirteenth hymns as well, Sūrya has been conceived in the form of Indra, but in the 20-22 hymns, Indra has been equated with the Sun.

The Brāhmaṇas

Coming to the *Brāhmaṇa* literature, it may be pointed out that the prowess and valorous aspects of Indra are covered by the curtain of the ritualistic practices. The killing of Vṛtra by Indra is found frequently mentioned. In several contexts the ritualistic practices are equated with the *vajra* of Indra. The *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (1.4.9) points out that Indra killed Vṛtra with the *vajra* of *ghee* (घृतेन हि इन्द्रो वृत्रहन्॥). In the *Kauṣītiki Brāhmaṇa* and the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (11.1.3.5), Indra is stated to have killed Vṛtra, after completing a *yajña* (on a full moon day). It is also stated in the *Kauṣītiki Brāhmaṇa* (23.2), it has been brought out that Indra had killed Vṛtra by means of the *Mahānamani Sūktas*. The *Brāhmaṇas* testify no doubt about the killing of the demon Vṛtra, but are quite silent about the mode of his killing, which is connected by them with the *yajñas*. In the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (2.1.3), it is stated that Indra killed Vṛtra with *Soma* seeking help from Agni.

The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (5.2.3.7), on the other hand, states that Indra after the killing of Vṛtra, established his superiority over the entire universe. It has further been stated therein that Vṛtra had pervaded the entire earth and the sky and that Indra killed him—

वृत्रो ह वा इव सर्वं वृत्वा शिश्ये यदिदमन्तरेण द्यावापृथिवी।

सर्वाद्दं सर्वं घृत्वा शिश्ये तस्माद् नाम्। तमिन्द्रो जघान्।

स हतः पूतिः सर्वत एवातो अभिप्रसुश्रुवे॥

—*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 1.1.3.4,5

Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa (2.4.12), too moves on the same line in so far as the origin of Vṛtra is concerned. In the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* (2.1.4), it is stated that at the time of the killing of Vṛtra by Indra, the former entangled the latter into sixteen serpent coils. Indra then gave offerings to

Agni, who getting pleased burned the sixteen coils of the serpents. In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (11.1.3.2), Indra has been called as Vimaśru (विमश्रु) because he kills the wicked people, and with the help of Brahmā and Bṛhaspati, he destroys the demons. He is adored by the Kṣatriyas (*Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, 7.4.5).

The Epics

Indra enjoys a somewhat subdued position in the epics viz., the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. In the *Mahābhārata*, Indra has been projected thrice (Vana-parvan, 21.10 and 292.4, Śalya-parvan, 43.37-38) highlighting the killing of the demon Nimuci. According to the story of the Śalya-parvan, once Nimuci absorbed himself into the rays of the sun. Indra then assured Nimuci that he would never kill him during the day or night, or at a dry or a wet place. Indra then ultimately killed him with the sea foam severing his head. The severed head then moved after Indra who somehow got rid of it by having a bath in the river—

नमुचिर्वासवाद भीतः सूर्य रश्मिम् समाविशत्।
तेनेन्द्र सख्यमक्रोत् समयं चेदमब्रवीत्॥
न चार्द्रेण न शुष्केण रात्रौ चापि चाहनि।
वधिष्याम्य सुरश्रेष्ठ सत्त्वे सत्येन ते शपे॥
एवं स कृत्वा समयं दृष्ट्वा नीहारमीश्वरः।
चिच्छेदास्य शिरो राजन अपां फेनेन वासवः॥
तच्छिरो नमुचेरिच्छन्नं पृष्टतः शक्रमन्वयात्।
भो मित्रहन् पापेति ब्रुवाणः शक्र मन्तिकात्॥

—*Mahābhārata*, Udyoga-parvan, 35-38

Namuci has been projected alive in the Śānti-parvan (Ch. 226) of the *Mahābhārata*, Nimuci, after he lost his riches and glory remains peaceful like the Pacific ocean and replies to the questions put forth by Indra. There is a common belief in the Purāṇas that Śukrācārya, with the use of the *Saṅjivini* knowledge, could revive the demons back to life and as such there had been no difficulty in projecting the ancient demons alive. In the Udyoga-parvan of the *Mahābhārata* (Ch. 10), some details of the story of the killing of Vṛtra have been mixed up with those of Nimuci. It has been brought out here that Indra is said to have killed Vṛtra by concealing the *vajra* with the seafoam because according to the boon of Brahmā, he could neither be killed during the day time nor the night time or with any wet or dry weapon.

The seed of another important story concerning Indra, are also found in the *Brāhmaṇas*. In the Bālakāṇḍa of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, it has been stated that Indra committed adultery with Ahalyā, the wife of Gautama as a result of which he was cursed by the sage. The genesis of this story could be traced in the following passage of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (3.3.2.18)—

हरि व आगच्छ मेधातिथि मेषवृषणश्वस्य मेवे।
गौरवादस्कन्दिन् आहत्यायै जार इति॥

This particular passage is also available in *Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa* (2.79) and *Ṣaḍaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* (1.1.2). This is the only reference about Ahalyā in the entire Vedic literature, but the personality of Ahalyā is quite hazy. Nothing has further been described about Indra as well, except that he had been the lover of Ahalyā. Evidently the story was well preserved in the human memory which was developed during the period of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Because of the development of the story at a considerable late stage, it was associated with Rāma incorporating the early elements of the story which developed later. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the sage Gautama has been described as the husband of Ahalyā. According to the story of the Bāla-kāṇḍa of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Indra once went to the hermitage of the sage Gautama taking to his form and prays for making love with her. When Ahalyā came to know of the fact that Indra himself had arrived to seek her love, she became fickle minded. When Gautama came to know about the adultery committed by both of them, he pronounced a curse on Indra to become impotent and to Ahalyā he cursed to remain invisible in the hermitage. He further declared that with entry of Rāma in the *āśrama*, she would regain her true form.

वायुभक्षा निराहारा तप्यन्ती भस्म शायिनी।
अदृश्या सर्वभूतानामाश्रमेऽस्मिन् वसिष्यसि॥
यदा चेत्तद् वनं घोरं रामो दशरथात्मजः।
आगमिष्यति दुर्धर्षस्तथा पूता भविष्यसि॥

—*Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, Bāla-kāṇḍa, 50.30-31.

The story of Ahalyā is also repeated in the Uttara-kāṇḍa of the *Rāmāyaṇa* with the difference that in this case Ahalyā does not submit to Indra of her own sweet will but she does so to Indra, who is disguised as Gautama—

अज्ञानाद् धर्षिता नाथ त्वदरूपेणदिवौकसा।
न कामकाराद् विप्रर्षे प्रसादं कर्तुमर्हसि॥

—Uttara-kāṇḍa, 30.42

About Ahalyā, it is stated in the texts that she was the paragon of beauty. Prajāpati had created her, enshrining in her the entire beauty of the universe. She was known as Ahalyā since she was completely devoid of ugliness. This story of *Rāmāyaṇa* has also been beautifully projected in *Brahma Purāṇa* (Chapter 87). This is possibly the best form of the story as compared with the other Purāṇas. In the Śānti-parvan of the *Mahābhārata*, a brief of the story also appears. As far as the material basis of this story of Indra and Ahalyā is concerned, the commentators had described it quite earlier. In the *Jaiminiya Sūtra* (9.1.42, 44), Kumarila Bhatta, while commenting on the subject, observes that 'Ahalyā' stands for the night. The night is called Ahalyā because it comes after the day, while the sun stands for Indra. The word 'Jara' according to the same commentator stands for the one who destroys or depreciates, because the word is formed by the root of जृ-वयोहानौ. Because of the destruction of the night by means of the sun, and the sun is conceived as Indra, the latter is called the lover of Ahalyā:

समस्त तेजः परमेश्वरत्वनिमित्तेन्द्रशब्दवाच्यं अहति लीयमानतया रात्रैः
अहल्याशब्दवाच्यतया क्षयात्मकजरण हेतु त्वाद् जीर्यति अस्मात् अनेन वा
उदितेन वा इत्यहल्या जार उच्यते न परस्त्री व्यभिचारात्॥

Several examples of Indra's having the solar background are available in the Vedic literature. A *Sūkta* in the seventeenth Kāṇḍa of the said Veda, equates both of them. In the *R̥gveda*, on the other hand, it is mentioned that Indra receives the light from the sun, which stands for a close relation between Indra and the sun. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (3.4.2.15), on the other hand, emphasises on the point thus—(एष व इन्द्र एष व तपति). The view is further brought out elsewhere in the same text (8.5.3.2). The *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* also contains a passage on the same subject thus—(असी वा आदित्य इन्द्रः॥). In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (2.3.1.7) too, Sūrya has been defined as Indra and the rays of the sun are described as *Viśvedevā*—

एते वै विश्वे देवा रश्मयः योऽथ परं भाः स इन्द्रः॥

While defining the passage of the *Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā* (3.10), it has been stated in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (2.3.1.37), that Sūrya is Indra who cohabits with the night—

सवितुमत्रसवाय। तव राज्या मिथुनं करोति।
सेन्द्रं करोति। इन्द्रो हि यज्ञस्य देवता तव
अह्ना वा उर्षसा वा मिथुनं करोति तत्
सूर्याय प्रत्यक्षं जुहोति।

The Purāṇas

In the Purāṇas, Indra has a personality which is completely devoid of any lustre. Though he remains as the god of gods, but he has no strength left even to subdue an ordinary demon. So much so that sometimes the ordinary humans of the earth prove to be more powerful than him. This aspect has been very well projected in the episode of the fight between Indra and Arjuna, over the burning of the Khāṇḍava forest, as brought out in the 22nd chapter of the Ādi-parvan of the *Mahābhārata*. In this episode, Indra was defeated with the shooting of the powerful and sharp arrows by Arjuna (22.7.3). Again when Indra is unsuccessful at the killing of the demon Nivātakavaca, then Arjuna is summoned from the earth, and accorded ceremonial welcome (Vana-parvan, 43.8-12). Sometimes Indra has to resort to degraded actions in order to meet his selfish ends. When he reached Sosada's son Parjanya with a request for the killing of the demons, he puts up a condition to Indra saying, "I can take up the killing of the demon, in case you turn yourself as a bull and serve me as the vehicle (*Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, 4.2.28-32). Indra had to accept this humiliating term for the subjugation of his enemy. The authority of Indra had been so badly depleted that any one could make him captive. While the defeat suffered by Indra at the hands of Meghanāda, the son of Rāvaṇa, is too well known as described in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, which earned the latter the title of Indrajit, in chapter 120 of the *Brahma Purāṇa*, Indra gets defeated at the hands of demon Hiranya who enslaved him. Indra somehow got himself freed from the clutches of the demon after facing many indignities. In the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (5.20), one comes

across a conflict between Kṛṣṇa and Indra. The latter tries to prevent Kṛṣṇa from carrying the Pārijāta tree which was required to be planted in the garden of Satyabhāmā, the spouse of Kṛṣṇa. Indra gets defeated at the hands of Kṛṣṇa too. In the *Matsya Purāṇa* (145.47), Vajrāṅga, the son of Diti enslaves Indra like a lion pouncing upon a deer.

बद्ध्वा ततः सहस्राक्षं पाशेनामोघवर्चसा।
मातुरन्तिकमागच्छद् व्याघ्र क्षुद्रमृगं यथा॥

An other aspect of the character of Indra, as highlighted in the *Purāṇas*, has been that he is quite jealous of others. He could not tolerate the increasing glory of the king Parthiva, who had already completed a hundred *Aśvamedha* sacrifices and the one who completes performing of this number of sacrifices, becomes entitled to claim for the throne of Indra. In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (8.1.1.10), the names of Indras who emerged in different *Manvantaras* have been listed. Indra has therefore to remain quite alert, lest someone would usurp his throne. Indra therefore becomes jealous of the king Pṛthu and then thinks of harming him.

इति चाधोक्षजेशस्य पृथौस्तु परमोदय।
असूयन् भगवानिन्द्रः प्रतिघातमचीकरत्॥

—*Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, 8.19.10

He, therefore, taking to a deceitful form steals away the sacrificial horse of Pṛthu. With his illusion he creates darkness everywhere. The sages get enraged and advice Pṛthu to perform *homa* in the sacrificial fire. Pṛthu does not agree with them and picks up his bow and arrow. The terrified Indra then returns the stolen horse to Pṛthu, touching his feet. This is a glaring example of the degradation of the authority of Indra, who was all powerful during the Vedic times.

In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (tenth Skanda) and the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (5.11), Kṛṣṇa vehemently opposes the adoration of Indra by the cowherds at the festival of *Indrayoga*. Kṛṣṇa objects to this ancient tradition of adoring Indra. This is indicative of the fact that the opposition to the Vedic ritualism had developed by that stage. Indra then intended to drown Gokula with the fall of heavy rains. But ultimately Indra is defeated and Kṛṣṇa emerges victorious. According to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (10.6.21, 22) and the *Mahābhārata* (Ādi-parvan, 57.60), Indra provides to Takṣaka, the great serpent, but when Janamejaya performs the serpent sacrifice, Indra is carried to the fire-altar of the *yajña* together with serpent Takṣaka, but is saved somehow—

तच्छ्रुत्वा आजुहुषिप्राः सहेन्द्र तक्षकं मखे।
तक्षकासु पतस्वेह सहेन्द्रेण मरुत्वता॥
इति ब्रह्मो विताक्षेपै स्थानाविन्द्रः प्रचालितः।

—*Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, 10.6.21-22

Similarly in the *Vana-parvan* (124.19) of the *Mahābhārata*, there is a story according to which, the sage Cyavana makes *Aśvinikumāras* to consume the *soma*-juice much against the wishes of Indra, who gets enraged and attempts at killing the sage Cyavana. The sage, however,

with his divine powers, made Indra's attempts infructuous. The sage then created a demon named Mada for the devouring of Indra (Vana-parvan, 124.21). Indra at least takes refuge with sage and is ultimately saved. Indra's height of indignity is projected in the Vana-parvan (Chapter 228) of the *Mahābhārata*, in which he attempts at the killing of a just born infant named Karttikeya but is defeated at his hand. In the *Matsya Purāṇa* (145.47), Vajrāṅga captures Indra defeating him, but is freed at the request of the sages like Kaśyapa and others. But when Vajrāṅga sits in meditation, Indra teases Vajrāṅga's wife variously.

तस्यां तपसि वर्तन्त्याम् इन्द्रः चक्रे विभीषिकाम्।
भूत्वा तु मर्कटस्तत्र तदाश्रमं पदं महान्॥
चक्रे विलोलं निशपं तुम्बीघटकरण्डकम्।
ततस्तु मेषरूपेण कम्यं तस्या अकरेन्महत्॥
भीषिकाभिरनेकाभिः ता विलश्यन् पाक शासनः॥

—*Matsya Purāṇa*, 145.60, 64, 67

In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (8.11.34) and the *Matsya Purāṇa* (124.11-13), the clouds are described to have been born out of the wings of the mountains, which were cut off by Indra.

पुष्करावर्तकः नाम ये मेषा पक्षसंभवाः।
शक्रेण पक्षारिच्छन्ना वै पर्वतानां महौजसाः॥
कामगानां स्मृद्धानां भूतानां नाशमिच्छताम्॥

Ultimately Indra was known as the god of rains who provided water for the universe. Sometimes he indulged in heavy rains causing deluge and at times, getting annoyed with someone, he made the Kingdom to face the drought conditions. In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the glory of Indra was described by Nanda, as under—

परजन्योभगवानिन्द्रो मेधातस्यात्ममूर्तयः।
तेभिवर्षन्ति भूताना प्रीणनं जीवनं पयः॥
तं तात वयं मन्ये च वामुर्चा पतिमीश्वरन्।
द्रव्यैस्तद्रेतसा सिद्धैर्यजन्ते कतुभिर्नराः॥

—*Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, 10.24.8-10

In the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* too, Nanda has advocated the adoration of Indra, almost on similar lines. Indra in this case is described to be the lord of the clouds. The water that comes from the clouds, makes the crops to grow and by consuming the grains the people can live on earth. As such the god of rain is required to be adored—

मेघानां पयसां चेशो देवराजः शतक्रतुः।
तेन संचोदिता मेघा वर्षन्त्यम्युमय रसम्॥
तद्वृष्टिं जनितां सत्यं वचमन्ये च वेहिनः।
वर्तयामोपयुजानाः तर्पयाभश्च देवताः॥
पर्जन्यः सर्व लोकस्योद् भवाय भुवि वर्षति।

—*Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, 5.10.19-23

The adoration of Indra was quite a natural one taking into consideration the fact that Indra is primarily the god of irrigation. That is why Indra was worshipped in one form or the other in the country. A festival of Indramaha or Indradhvaja has been quite a popular mode of worship of Indra with the masses, which is found mentioned in the fifth century Tamil work entitled *Śilpadhikaram*, Varāhamihir's *Brhat Samhitā* of the seventh century AD and the *Samarāṅgana Sūtradhāra* of the twelfth century AD. Indra is supposed to mount over a beautiful chariot, the description of which is provided in the *Matsya Purāṇa* as follows—

वज्रविस्फुर्जितोद्भूतै विद्युदिन्द्रा युधीदितैः।
युक्तो वलाहकगणैः पर्वतैरिव कामगैः॥

—*Matsya Purāṇa*, 173.6

Though the importance of Indra went on declining after the post-Vedic period, but his presence in the Indian religious art could not be erased. He was therefore found present in the Indian religious scene in one form or the other and as such his iconographical features were described elaborately in the *Śilpa*-texts, and a few of the various instances are brought out hereunder—

(a) *Amśubhedāgama*

श्यामवर्ण(र्ण) द्विहस्तं च रक्ताम्बरधरं शुभम्।
किरीटमकुटोपेतं सर्वाभरणभूषितम्॥
शक्तिर्दक्षिणहस्ते तु वामहस्तेऽङ्कुशं धृतम्।
विशालोदरग्रीवं च वामे शचीसमन्वितम्॥
द्विनेत्रं सौम्यवदनं सिंहासनोपरि स्थितम्।
आसीनं वा प्रकर्तव्यं गजारूढमथापि वा॥
इन्द्रमेवं समाख्यातमश्विन्यौ च प्रवक्ष्यते।

(b) *Suprabhedāgama*

इन्द्रमैन्द्रे तु मतिमास्त्विन्द्रो वज्राङ्कुशोधरात्।
श्यामाङ्गं तु गजारूढमप्सरोगणसंयुतम्॥

(c) *Śilparatna*

सुरराजं प्रवक्ष्येऽहमैरावतसमाश्रितम्।
किरीटकुण्डलधरं भुजद्वयसमन्वितम्॥
कुलिशं दक्षिणे पाणौ वामहस्ते तथोत्पलम्।
दिव्यरत्नविभूषाढ्यं दिव्यचीनांशुकैर्युतम्॥
चित्रचामरधारिण्यौ स्त्रियौ पार्श्वे प्रकल्पयेत्।
सिंहासनस्थमथवा लिखेद् गन्धर्वसंयुतम्॥
इन्द्राणीं वामतस्तस्य लिखेदुत्पलधारिणीम्।
दिव्यशृङ्गारसंयुक्तमिन्द्रवक्रावलोकिनीम्॥

(d) *Br̥hat Sam̥hitā*

शुक्लश्चतुर्विषाणो द्विपो महेन्द्रस्य वज्रपाणित्वं च।
तिर्यग्ललाटकसंस्थं तृतीयमपि लोचनं चिह्नम्॥

(e) *Viṣṇudharmottara*

चतुर्दन्ते गजे सक्तः श्वेतः कार्यस्सुरेश्वरः।
वामोत्सङ्गता कार्या तस्य भार्या शची नृप! ॥
नीलवस्त्रा सुवर्णाभा सर्वाभरणवांस्तथा।
तिर्यग्ललाटकस्ताक्षर्यः (स्थाक्षः?) कर्तव्यश्च विभूषितः॥
शक्रश्चतुर्भुजः कार्यो द्विभुजा च तथा शशी(ची?)।
पद्माङ्गुशौ च कर्तव्यौ वामदक्षिणहस्तयोः॥
वामं शचीपृष्ठगतं द्वितीयं वज्रसंयुतम्।
वामे शच्याः करे कार्या रम्या सन्तानमञ्जरी॥

(f) *Pūrvakāraṇāgama*

वज्रपाणिर्महावीरस्सिंहस्कन्धोऽवलीलधृक्।
ललाटोरस्थलायामपीवरोरुर्महोदरः॥
प्रसन्नवदनश्श्यामवर्णो रक्ताम्बरस्सुखी।
किरीटकुण्डली हारकेयूरादिविभूषितः॥
पृथुशिरोगजारूढो देवराजश्शचीपतिः।
शक्रस्याकृतिरेवं तु चण्डेशस्याकृतिं शृणु॥

(g) *Rūpamaṇḍana*

वरं वराङ्गुशौ चैव कुण्डौ धत्ते करैस्तु यः।
गजारूढः सहस्राक्ष इन्द्रः पूर्वदिशाधिपः॥

Indeed Indra, together with Agni and Sūrya, by means of sacrifice obtained supremacy over the other gods; and if we may judge from the number of hymns addressed to him in the Vedas, he was the most popular deity.

He is the god of the firmament, in whose hands are the thunder and the lightning; at whose command the refreshing showers fall to render the earth fruitful. When it is borne in mind that in India for months together the earth is exposed to the scorching rays of the sun, sometimes without a single shower, so that it is impossible for the fields to be ploughed or the seed to be sown, it will not be regarded as unusual, that the god who is supposed to bestow rain should frequently be appealed to, and that the most laudatory songs should be addressed to him. To the poetic minds of that age, the clouds that the winds brought up from the ocean were enemies who held their treasures in their fast embrace until, conquered by Indra, they were forced to pour them upon the parched soil. And very naturally when, in answer to the cry of his worshippers, the genial rains descended, and the earth was thereby changed from a wilderness to a garden, songs

of thanksgiving and praise couched in the strongest terms, were addressed to him. The attributes ascribed to him refer principally to his physical superiority; and the blessings sought from him are chiefly of a temporal rather than a spiritual character.

Indra is not regarded as an uncreated deity. In some hymns he is spoken of as the twin-brother of Agni, and therefore the son of Heaven and Earth; whilst, in other hymns, heaven and earth are said to have been formed by him. Although his parents are often referred to, it is but seldom that they are named; and when they are named, it is not always that the same parentage is given. He is the king of the gods; and in post-Vedic ages, it is taught that his reign extends for a hundred divine years only; at the end of which time he may be superseded as king by some other of the gods, or even by man, if any be able to perform the severe penance necessary to obtain this exalted position.

In pictures, Indra is represented as a man with four arms and hands; in two he holds a lance, in the third a thunderbolt, whilst the fourth is empty. He is often painted with two arms only, and, having eyes all over his body, is then called *Sahasrākṣa* (the thousand-eyed). He is generally depicted as riding upon the wonderful elephant *Airāvata*, who was produced at the churning of the ocean, carrying a thunderbolt in his right hand and a bow in his left. In the Vedic Age his worship was far more popular than it is at present. He is no longer the principal deity, but chief of the inferior gods only.

The position and attributes of Indra as taught by the Vedas will be seen from the following description, abbreviated from that given by Dr. Muir.

Being invoked by mortals, Indra is born. The sky and earth trembled at his appearance, and the sky exclaimed.

Immediately after his birth the god gave unmistakable evidence of his divinity. Grasping his weapons, he cried.

Borne in his chariot, hastened by the prayers of his people, the god appears.

Ready prepared for him is a feast, the principal attraction of which is the *soma*-juice. Indra was particularly fond of this intoxicating drink. It is a most strange circumstance that, whilst the Hindus of the present day are prohibited from the use of intoxicants, Indra is described as being addicted to the *soma*. whilst the drink itself is deified and worshipped as a god.

Indra, after singing the praises of the *soma*-juice, drinks the proffered cup, and as a result is most graciously disposed towards the worshippers, ready to give whatever they ask. When thus strengthened by the draught, he goes forth to meet the great enemy he came to conquer. This enemy is *Vṛtra* (Drought). And in the conflict and victory are seen the peculiar blessings to the earth and man that Indra is able to grant.

The battle is described at length; in which we have a graphic description of the commencement of the rainy season, with the severe thunderstorms which usually accompany this change of the seasons.

After this blessing has been received the sun shines, and earth again is bright; the gods come with their congratulations to their king, and men present their thanks-giving.

Such was Indra in ancient times, and though worshipped still, he occupies a very inferior position in the present age. As mentioned previously, according to the teaching of the later books, his rule over the gods continues for a hundred divine years; at the expiration of which time he may be superseded by another gods or even by a man. The *Purāṇas* teach that, in each age of the world, a different being has enjoyed this position. In the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* is the following story of a man raising himself to the throne of Indra.

There was a war between the gods and demons; both parties inquired of Brahmā, which would be victorious. Brahmā replied, "The side for which Rāji (an earthly king) shall take up arms."

The demons first called upon Rāji to invoke his aid. He promised to assist them, provided they would make him their Indra. They replied that they could not promise this, as Prahlāda was Indra already. The same condition was proposed to the gods, to which they consented, and Rāji became their Indra. He then fought for them and conquered. Upon this, Indra bowed down before him, and, placing Rāji's foot upon his head, said, "Thou hast preserved me from a great danger. I acknowledge thee as my father; thou art king over all; I am thy son." Rāji, however, was contented to remain as king on earth, and appointed Indra to continue as his representative on the throne of heaven. On the death of Rāji, his sons wished to become kings of heaven. This Indra opposed, but was compelled to yield. After a time, being sad because deprived of his share in the sacrifices of mortals, Indra met with his spiritual preceptor and asked him for a morsel of the sacrificial butter. The teacher replied that, had Indra applied to him earlier, he would not have been reduced to such straits; but "as it is", he said, "I will regain your sovereignty in a few days." Upon this he commenced a sacrifice, with the special purpose of obtaining power for Indra. The result of this was, that Rāji's sons were led into sin; they became enemies of the Brāhmaṇas, despised the Vedas, and neglected their religious duties. When thus weakened, Indra fell upon and slew them.

The most effectual way by which a mortal could obtain the position of Indra was by the sacrifice of a hundred horses; and as will be seen in the account of Gaṅgā, Indra did not object to play the part of a thief, so as to prevent the completion of the sacrifice by which he was to be deprived of his sovereignty. The most common and generally successful method by which these ambitious mortals were frustrated in their design, was by his sending down some celestial nymphs, called Apsarās, who by their beauty distracted the thoughts of the devotees and so rendered them unfit to offer this great sacrifice.

In the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, there is a legend of a great conflict between Indra and Kṛṣṇa, in which Indra is overcome. Kṛṣṇa, accompanied by his wife Satyabhāmā, visits Indra in his heaven. On her arrival there, this lady was most anxious to obtain possession of the Pārijāta tree, which was produced at the churning of the ocean, and planted in Indra's heavenly garden. This tree was beautiful in form, was adorned with lovely and sweet-scented flowers, and bore most luscious

fruit. The flowers had this virtue, that, worn in the hair by a wife, they enabled her to retain the love of her husband; whilst those, who ate the fruit of this tree could remember what had occurred in their previous states of existence. At the request of his wife, Kṛṣṇa took the tree, and placed it upon Garuḍa, his wonderful bird-vehicle. Immediately there was an uproar in heaven; though Indra and his attendant deities tried to prevent the removal of this tree, they could not do so. Kṛṣṇa caught the thunderbolt of Indra in his hand, and, returning home unhurt, planted the tree in his garden.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* has a story showing that Indra was believed to have been guilty of the grossest immorality—the seduction of the wife of his spiritual teacher. He is said to have visited the house of Gautama during his absence, in the form of a sage, hoping to be mistaken, by the preceptor's wife, for her husband. But although Ahalyā knew him to be Indra, she yielded to his wishes. As Indra was about to leave the house, Gautama returned, and, knowing what had happened, cursed the god and also his wife. Indra in consequence lost his manhood; and Ahalyā was doomed to live for many years invisible in a forest, until Rāma should meet her there and restore her to her former state. Another account of this curse of Gautama was, that Indra was compelled to carry about with him a thousand disgraceful marks upon his body, that all-seeing might know the great sin of which he had been guilty. At Indra's earnest request these were changed from their original form into eyes; which by the ignorant were regarded as an indication of his omniscience.

The heaven of Indra must not be passed over without notice, as it is there that the good on earth hope to go far a time, as a reward of their holy lives. To go to *Svarga*, as his heaven is named, is not the highest happiness a man can obtain, because he cannot remain there for ever. When his allotted years of happiness there are over, he must return to earth and live other lives, until he becomes perfect and fit to enjoy the highest felicity—absorption into the Divine Being. The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* says, "Not in hell alone do the souls of the deceased undergo pain; there is no cessation even in heaven; for its temporary inhabitant is ever tormented with the prospect of descending again to earth. Again must he be born upon earth, and again must he die. Whatever is produced that is most acceptable to him becomes a seed whence springs the tree of sorrow."

The home of Indra is situated on Mount Meru. It has beautiful houses for its inhabitants to inhabit; and the splendour of its capital is unequalled in the universe. Its gardens are stocked with trees that afford a grateful shade, yield the most luscious fruits, and are adorned with beautiful and fragrant flowers. Most beautiful nymphs (*Apsarās*) charm the happy inhabitants, whilst choristers and musicians, unrivalled in the universe, discourse sweet music. The city was built by Viśvakarmā. It is eight hundred miles in circumference, and forty miles high. Its pillars are made of diamonds; its palaces, thrones, and furniture are made of pure gold.

In Bengal this deity is worshipped one day in each year. His image is made of mud, prettily painted; on the day after it has been worshipped it is cast into the river. At the commencement of a sacrifice, too, he is invoked, in the hope that he will convey the prayers and offerings to the deity specially worshipped at that time, or that he will conduct the deity into the presence

of the worshippers. In seasons of drought special offerings are made to him in some parts of the country, that through his power the clouds may pour their streams upon the parched country.

The more common of Indra's other names are the following—Sakra—the able one; Divapati—the lord of the gods; Bajrī—he who wields the thunderbolt; Vṛitrah—the destroyer of Vṛitra; Meghavāhana—he who rides on the clouds; Mahendra, Svargapati—the lord of heaven.

2. Maruts

The word Maruts in the *Rgveda*, stands for storms or the wind and as such he is conceived as a group of gods rather than a single god. In spite of this, the form and the formations of this group of gods remain the same. Yask in the *Nirukta* has defined the word Maruts in three different ways—

मरुतो मितराविणो च मितरोचनो वा महद् द्रवन्ति इति वा॥

—*Nirukta*, 11.13

According to Durgācārya, the word *Mita* (मित) stands for suitable, comparable or convenient. Those who thunder properly are called Maruts (मित नाम सुश्लिष्टम्। तथा तेषां योग्यं रवितुं तथा रवन्ति स्तनयन्ति). It pleases in the best manner and as such it is called Maruts. Because of it moving with speed, here and there it is also called Maruts. There is hardly any definite mention about the Maruts in the *Rgveda*. In some places their number is given to be one hundred and eighty or thrice sixty (*Rgveda*, VIII.96.8). (त्रिः षष्टिस्त्वा मरुतो वा वृधानाः।). But in some hymns, their number has been given as thrice seven (twenty-one) (त्रिसप्तोः शूर सत्त्वभिः।). In the *Atharvaveda* too, the number has been pronounced as twenty-one (त्रिषप्तासः). In the *Vājasneyi Samhitā* (21.27), the number of Maruts has been given as twenty-seven (त्रिणवे मरुतः स्तुताः) but in (17.81.85) passage, the number, in the same text has been given as 7, 14, 21, 28, 35 and 42. In the following *Brāhmaṇas*, Maruts have been divided into the group of seven (सप्त सप्त हि मारुतो गणः॥)—

(i) *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*, 4.6.5.

(ii) *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 2.5.1.13; 4.5.3.17 and 9.3.1.25.

In the *Taittirīya Samhitā* (2.2.5), they are divided into seven groups of seven each, bringing their number to forty-nine. The same number has been repeated in the *Purāṇas* and the epics. All the Maruts are of the same age and none of them is elder or the younger—

अज्येष्ठासो अकनिष्ठासौ ऐते सं भ्रातरोवावृधुः सौभगाय।

—*Rgveda*, I.165.1

Because of their association with storm, they are also related to Rudra, quite intimately. That is why they are called as the sons of Rudra (रुद्रासः) (*Rgveda*, I.39.4). They are said to have been begotten by Rudra from their Pṛṣṇi (*Rgveda*, 2.34.2).

In one passage in the *R̥gveda*, these gods are said to be one hundred and eighty in number; in another text, twenty-seven is the number given; whilst in the *Purāṇas* they are said to be forty-nine. In the *Vedas* they are called the sons of Rudra. They are the companions of Indra and at times they worship him, thus acknowledge his superiority; at others they seem to assert their inherent power, and remind Indra of the aid they have given him. They are addressed in the following strain—

“Spears rest upon your shoulders, O Maruts; you have anklets on your feet, golden ornaments on your breasts, lustre in your ears, fiery lightnings in your hands, and golden helmets placed on your heads.”

They are armed with golden weapons and lightnings; dart thunderbolts, gleam like flames of fire, and are borne along with the fury of boisterous winds. They split *Vṛtra* (Drought) to pieces, are clothed with rain, create darkness during the day, water the earth, and avert heat. They cause the earth and the mountains to quake. They were accustomed to the use of the *soma*; and were appealed to, to bring healing remedies, which are described as abiding in the (river) *Sindhu*, the seas, and the hills.

In the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, we find quite a different account of the Maruts. They are said to be the sons of Kaśyapa and Diti. Diti having lost her children, propitiated her husband, who promised her a boon. She asked that she might have a son of irresistible prowess and valour, who should destroy Indra. The sage promised to grant this request on one condition. “You shall bear a son”, he said, “who shall slay Indra, if with thoughts wholly pious, and person entirely pure, you carefully carry the babe in your womb for a hundred years.” Diti accepted the boon with this condition. Indra hearing of this, tried his best to distract her mind, and to prevent the birth of this wonderful child. When ninety-nine years had passed, an opportunity offered itself. Diti retired to rest one night without having washed her feet, and thus violated a rule of ceremonial purity. Indra availed himself of this neglect, and was able to accomplish his purpose. With his thunderbolt he cut the embryo into seven parts. The child thus mutilated cried bitterly; and though Indra tried, he was unable to conceal it. Being incensed at their obstinacy in crying, he cut each of these seven parts in seven, and thus formed the forty-nine Maruts. Their name was given to them from the words ‘*mā rodih*’ (weep not), used by Indra when trying to quiet them; and they became subordinate deities—the associates of the wielder of the thunderbolt.

3. Vāyu (The Wind-God)

The god of wind seems to have been conceived in the Vedic literature like Agni, the god of fire, keeping in view his material usages in human life as well the lives of other creatures. A thin sheet of god-hood covers the god. He represents the representative god of the space. Initially he was associated with Indra and both of them have been considered to be important gods of the space. Both Indra and Vāyu have been adored together in some of the Vedic hymns. In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (4.10.3.12) too, Indra has been equated with Vāyu. The god Vāyu has also been eulogised or invoked in the Vedic literature as Vāta. But this epithet emphasises on the material aspect of the god and as such Vāta is found more in association of *Parjanya*. In

the *Puruṣa Sūkta* (X.90) of the *R̥gveda*, Vāyu has been declared as born of the *Prāṇas* of the *Ādi-Puruṣa* or primeval-man (प्राणाद् वायुरजायत्). The *Atharvaveda*, on the other hand, (XI.4.15), testifies Vāyu to be *Prāṇa*—

प्राणमाहुः मातरिश्वान वातो ह प्राण उच्चते॥

The same aspect has been projected in the *Taittiriya Saṁhitā* (5.1.5) as detailed below—

सं ते वायु मातरिश्वा दधातु इत्याह॥ प्राणो वै वायुः।

प्रणेनेवास्यै प्राणात् संघाति॥

Vāyu was continued to be adored in the epics and the *Purāṇas*. But at this stage he was turned into a personified god, besides continuing to remain in abstract form. In the *Uttara-kāṇḍa* of the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* (35.60-61), Vāyu has been termed as the life of all the creatures, while describing the qualities of *Brahmā*. It is further stated therein that without Vāyu, the body becomes like the log of wood—

अशरीरः शरीरेषु वायश्चरति पालयन्।

शरीरं हि विना वायु समता याति दारुभिः।

वायुः प्राणः सुखं वायुः वायु सर्वमिव जगत्॥

Because of the association of Vāyu with *Indra*, both of them are stated to share the same chariot (इन्द्र वायु सॄथं यातमर्वाक् *R̥gveda*, VII.91.5). It has further been described that both the gods mounted over the same chariot roam about in the sky (*Ibid.*, I.23.2). The chariot of Vāyu is stated to be driven by many horses, the number of which has been variously described. In two passages, Vāyu has been described as the son-in-law of *Tvaṣṭā* (*Ibid.*, VIII.26.21). He has further been described as the son of *Dyāvā-Pṛthivī* (VII.90.3). In another passage, Vāyu has been termed to be the creator of *Maruts* and the rivers of the space are said to emerge from the same (I.134.4).

Vāyu also has a special relationship with *Soma*. He is described as the protector of *Soma* (वायु सोमस्य रक्षितः). He is said to be consuming the pure *soma*. In several of the *R̥gvedic* hymns, Vāyu has been stated to be drinking *soma* with *Indra*—

पूर्व पेयं हि वां हितम्। तुभ्यं किं पूर्व पीतये देवा देवाय ये निरे।

—*R̥gveda*, I.135.1

There is a small story told in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, in which the reason for giving away the share of *soma* to Vāyu is brought out—

देवा वै सोमस्य राज्ञो अग्रपेये न समपादयन् अहं प्रथमः पिवेय महं प्रथमः
पिवेय मित्येव अकामयन्त। ते सम्पादयन्तो अब्रुवन् हन्त आजिम् अयाम स यो
न उज्जेष्यति स प्रथमः सोमस्य पास्यति। तथेति।.... तेषां वायुर्मुखं प्रथमः
प्रत्यपद्यत अथेन्द्रः। स अवेद इन्द्रो वायुमद् वै जयतीति तमनुप्रापतत् तुरीयं मे
अथ उज्जयाव इति।....

—*Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, 2.4.1

There had been a competition among the gods for the drinking of *soma*. It was decided to organise a contest for the purpose and the wind-god left all behind in the race and was successful. Indra then asked Vāyu to part with half of his share. But Vāyu in turn was prepared to part with only one-fourth of it. Accordingly first of all Vāyu gets three-fourth of the share of *soma* and the remaining one-fourth to Indra. In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (13.1.2.7), Vāyu is conceived to be the foremost in speed (वायुर्वे देवानामशिष्ट॥).

The *Yajurveda* brings out another aspect of Vāyu according to which he is described to be the remover of the sins. Moreover the blowing of the wind removes the bad smell on earth as a result of which he has been described as *Pavana* as well. Keeping the purifying aspect of Vāyu in view, Vāta has been invoked in the *Rgveda* (X.186.1), for the long life of the people. Similarly in the *Śukla-yajurveda* (4.4), the epithets of *Acchidra* and *Pavitra* have been used. In the *Vājasneyi Samhitā* (20.15), the purifying form of Vāyu has been highlighted. Besides, he has been conceived to be the remover of all the sins committed during the day or the night—

यदि दिवा यदि नक्तम् एनासि चक्रमा व्यम्।

वायुर्मा तस्मादेनसो विश्वान् मञ्चतु अंहतः॥

There is a story in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (4.1.3.7) according to which Soma once became impure and started emitting bad smell. All the gods then went to Vāyu and prayed him for the purification of Soma—

स एषामाश्रयत्। स एनान् शुक्तः पुतिरभि भवौ। सनालम्
अहुल्या आंसु, नालं भक्षाय। ते देवा वायुमब्रुवन्। वायो इम
नो विवाहि। इमं नो स्वदेयति।... तथेति होवाच यूयं तु
सच्यु पवातेति॥

The *Atharvaveda* too testifies that the Wind-god purifies with the power of purification inherent in him—

वायो पूतः पवित्रेण प्रत्यङ् सोमो इति हुतः॥

—6.5.1

Vāyu is also stated to be connected with the animals in the *Atharvaveda* (6.124.1). He is said to collect them all at one place. He has been invoked to free some of the domesticated animals possibly of the diseases—

येग्राम्य पंशवो विश्वरूपा विरूपा सन्तो बहुधैकरूमाः।

वायुष्टानग्रे प्र मुमोक्तु देवः प्रजापति प्रजया सरेराणः॥

—*Atharvaveda*, 6.34.4

Because of the speed with which Vāyu moves and his omnipresent nature he has also been termed as the messenger of the gods. According to a story in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, the gods deputed Vāyu to search for Vṛtra, to enable Indra to attack him. It was also to be found out whether Vṛtra was dead or alive. In case Vṛtra was alive, Vāyu could come back and report accordingly—

ते ह देवा ऊचुः। न वै हतं वृत्रं विद्म न जीवन्तम्। ते वायुम्
 ब्रुवन्। वायो त्वमिदं विद्धि। यदि हतो वृत्रो जीवति वा।।
 त्वं वै न अशिष्टो असि। यदि जीविष्यति त्वमेव क्षिप्रं
 पुनरागमिष्यति इति। तथेत्येयाय वायुरैद्धतं वृत्रम्।
 सहोवाच हतो वृत्रः।।

The messenger aspect of Vāyu travelled to the Epics and the Purāṇas. In the Vana-parvan (19.22-24) of the *Mahābhārata*, the gods in order to have Śālva killed by Pradyumna, send a message to the latter for killing him at once. In some of the *Rāmāyaṇas* the gods send Vāyu as a messenger to Rāma when he was helplessly lying in the battlefield bound with Nāgapāśa to summon Garuḍa to free himself from the bondage of the snakes. Rāma did so and on the arrival of Garuḍa, he was freed from the bondage. In the *Matsya Purāṇa* (152.39), Kusumamahinī, the friend of Pārvatī, conveys the message about the killing of Ādi through Vāyu—

अपरि छिन्नतत्त्वार्था शैल पुत्रै न्यवेदयत्।
 दूतेन मारुतेनाशु गामिना नागदेवता।
 श्रुत्वा वायु मुखाद् देवी।

The Uttara-kāṇḍa of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Sarga-35) Añjanā, the wife of Kesarī is said to have conceived coming in touch with the Wind-god. As a result of this Hanumān was born, who possessed great prowess—

यत्र राज्यं प्रशास्त्यस्य केसरी नाम वै पिता।
 तस्य भार्या वभूवेष्टा अंजनति परिश्रुता।
 जनयामास तस्यां वै वायुरात्मजमत्तमम्।।

—7.35.19.20

Vāyu indeed is immensely attached to his son and saves Hanumān in all respects. When Indra attacks Hanumān with *vajra*, who was moving towards sun, then Vāyu stops the air which is the main source of life of the creatures on earth. Without the movement of the air in the body even the urine and the bowels of the men cannot clear and the breathing stops; all the joints start aching—

तस्मिंस्तु पतिते काले वज्रताडन विह्वले।
 चुक्रोधेन्द्राय पवनः प्रजानामहिताय सः।।
 प्रचारं स तु संगृह्य प्रजास्वन्तर्गतः प्रभुः।
 विष्णुमूत्राशयमावृत्य प्रजानां परमार्तिकृत्।
 रुरोध सर्वभूतानि यथा वर्षाणि वासवः।।
 वायु प्रकोपाद् भूतानि निरुच्छ्वसितानि सर्वशः।
 सन्धिभिर्भिद्यमानैश्च काष्ठभूतानि जक्षिरे।।

—Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa, 7.35.48-51

Thereafter the Wind-god carrying the child in his lap goes to a mountain cave (गुहां प्रविष्टः स्वसुतं शिशुमादाय मारुतः॥ *Ibid.*, 7.35.41). The body of the boy is adorned with the gold ornaments and *kuṇḍalas* in the ears. There is a necklace around the neck. On the arrival of Brahmā in the cave, Vāyu gets up and falls over his feet—

ततः पितामहं दृष्ट्वा वायु पुत्रवधादितः।
 शिशुकं तं समादाय उत्तस्थौ धातुरग्रतः॥
 चलत्कुण्डल मौलिस्त्रक् तपनीय विभूषणः।
 पादयोन्यपतद् वायुः त्रिरुपस्थाय वेधसः॥

—*Ibid.*, 7.36.1-2

Here Vāyu has taken to the human form. Indeed the material and the divine figures of Vāyu could never be equated. Both of them have been mentioned separately. In spite of this, it is rather difficult to draw any definite line between the two forms of Vāyu like Agni.

In the Śānti-parvan of the *Mahābhārata* (Ch. 156), there is a story of the silk cotton tree. In this a *Śālmali* tree boasts before Nārada of its possessing great prowess. It further stated that it was not at all afraid of the Wind-god. Nārada then goes to the Wind-god and speaks to him about the boasting of the tree. Thereafter the Wind-god displays his anger over the tree (*Ibid.*, 156.9). In the Ādi-parvan of the *Mahābhārata* (72.1-4), Indra deposes Menaka for the disturbing of the *tapas* of Viśvāmitra. The Wind-god also is made to accompany her in order to help her. The Wind-god carried away her garments. In the Śānti-parvan of the *Mahābhārata* (155.9), the Wind-god has been termed as the strongest of all. Indra, Yama, Kubera and Varuṇa are stated to be less powerful before him. In the *Mahābhārata* (Ādi-parvan, 122.11-14), Bhīmasena is described to be the son of Vāyu, who possessed the strength of ten thousand elephants. It is also stated therein that after the tenth day of his birth Bhīma is stated to have fallen on the ground which made the stone slab to break into pieces. The strength of Hanumān, the son of the Wind-god has been fully described in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The Wind-god, on the other hand, has been described to be quite voluptuous who glanced at the daughters of the king Kuśanābha, who were engaged in water sport removing their clothes and was infested with passion and intended to marry them. But when the girls declined to oblige the Wind-god, he made them hunchbacked—

तासां तद्वचनं श्रुत्वा वायु परम कोपनः।
 प्रविष्य सर्व गात्राणि वधजं भगवान् प्रभु॥

—*Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, 1.32.23

While describing the form of Vāyu, it is stated in the *Vāyu Purāṇa* (2.38-45), that he happened to be the pupil of Svayambhū Brahmā and was quite self disciplined, intelligent and possessed all the *siddhis*. In the *Matsya Purāṇa*, Vāyu has been described to be the creator of Agni, lord of all, the seven tunes of the musical instrument emerged from him. He possesses great speeds and roams about in the sky. He also is the one who controlled speech—

यमाहुरग्निकर्तारं सर्वप्रभवमीश्वरम्।
 सप्तस्वरगतो यश्च नित्यं गीभिरुदीर्यते॥

य वदन्त्युत्तमं भूतं यं वदन्त्य शरीरिणम्।
 यमाहुःकाशगमं शीघ्रमं शब्दयोगिनम्॥
 सः वायु सर्व भूतायुः उद्भूतः स्वेन तेजसः॥

—*Matsya Purāṇa*, 173.29-31

In the Vedas, the cars of the gods, though generally drawn by horses, are also described as yoked with various other animals such as antelopes of Maruts, and the goat of Puṣaṇ. In the case of Marut, the post-Vedic *vāhana* has not changed. According to the Āgama texts, the vehicle of the personified *bāṇa* is the wind. Vāyu and his banner is the feather. In the *Śaiva Āgamas*, the Murtisvara of Śiva of Vāyutattva is Kāla, and he happens to be the husband of Kālī. Parā-Śakti assumes the form of Kālī as *Vāyu-ākāra*. The vehicles in the Indian sculptures serve as the marks of identification laid down in the Vedic and other texts. The other way to distinguish a god were his attributes. Thus for Vāyu it is the flag or the banner. The number of distinguishing symbols gradually increased in the due course of time.

Vāyu images depict the god usually with four arms. It has already been stated that Vāta is an other epithet used for Vāyu and as such Vāta and Vāyu both of them denote the Vedic deities. Vāyu, however, is treated to be a god while Vāta is treated to be an element.

In chapter 2 of the 'Devī Māhātmya' of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, it is mentioned that the killing of Mahiṣāsura, the essence of energy or the light that every god has, emanated from his body and led to the making of the perfect form of Mahiṣāsuramardini. Among the particular limbs of the goddess formed from the essence of the various gods, the ears are said to have been formed from the Wind-god. In order, however, to equip the goddess with the weapons for her safety, Maruts are said to have given a bow and the quiver.

The texts on Hindu iconography describe Vāyu to be of youthful appearance, with black complexion, possessing two or more hands. His eyes are supposed to be red and he is to be clad in white costumes. He should have a wavy curved brow and be adorned with all the ornaments. In his right hand, he is supposed to carry a banner, and a staff in the left hand. His hair should be dishevelled and should be seated over a *Simhāsana* or a deer.

The *Viṣṇudharmottara* states that the colour of Vāyu's body and the garments should be sky-blue and he should carry in his hands a banner and a *cakra*. Vāyu should have his mouth open and his consort should be made to sit to his left. According to *Mānasollāsa*, Vāyu is described as having two hands, one holding a banner and the other in *varada-mudrā*. He should be adorned with *mukuta* and the *kuṇḍalas*. The text of *Rūpamaṇḍana* and the *Devatāmūrtiprakaraṇam*, Vāyu has to be depicted with four arms, holding *varada-mudrā*, a banner or *daṇḍa*, a flag and a *kamaṇḍalu*.

Some of the Jaina texts also describe about the iconography of Vāyu, according to which Vāyu rides a deer according to Digambaras while some of the Śvetāmbara texts provide him with the attribute of *vajra*. The Digambaras, however, provide him with the broken branch of a tree as an attribute. Thus the Brāhmaṇical Vāyu does not differ materially with the Jaina Vāyu except

for the assignment of the attributes. The Yakṣa of Padmaprabha who presents some affinity with Vāyu is Kusuma, who likewise rides a deer according to both the Jaina sects. Besides his Yakṣi is called Manovega, having an antelope as her conveyance.

In Hinduism, god Vāyu was included in the *Aṣṭa-Dikpālas*, who were considered to be the gods of the eight directions. In this connection it may be pointed out that the Purāṇic seers thought it fit to compose an exclusive Purāṇa under the name of *Vāyu Purāṇa*, which happens to be one of the eighteen prominent Purāṇas. Thus Vāyu was sculptured in the temples together with other images of *Aṣṭa-Dikpālas*. But the temples exclusively dedicated to him are also met with occasionally, one such temple of Vāyu is found with a beautiful step well by its side, at Vayada which is now a deserted village in Gujarat. The temple was badly damaged and its image was removed and reinstalled at Pattan. The guardian of the north-west quarter in the said image which is of metal, is accompanied with his consort Vāyavī or Añjanā, the mother of Hanumān. The face of Vāyavī-devī is monkey-like and she is two armed. The four arms of Vāyu hold an *akṣasūtra*, a banner, *varada-mudrā* and a *kamaṇḍalu*. The antelope is seen at the feet towards the left of the image.

The original temple of Vāyu is believed to have existed at Vadodara as well in which images of both Vāyu and Vāyavī are enshrined. Their iconographical features are said to be the same as are found in the Vāyu temple at Broach, which is, however, of black granite stone. Vāyavī Devī is shown in seated position as if riding a deer. She holds in one of the four hands the child Māruti.

The temples of Vāyu are often found at Bhuj in Cutch, Cambay, Ahmedabad, Broach, Surat and Andheri. Significantly all these temples are situated in the proximity of the Western and the Arabian sea. In fact Vāyu happens to be the family-god of many of the Vaiśya families of Gujarat. This is particularly due to the fact that the Vaiśya community in Gujarat had been a trading community since ancient times having the flourishing trade with the countries of the Arabian sea, in which the wind played quite a prominent role.

4. Rudra

The genesis of the god Rudra or later known as Śiva, is difficult to spell out. His personality is so complex that it would be difficult to associate his origin with one or the other god. He, on the one hand, is the horrible destroyer who destroys the entire universe with the opening of his third eye reducing everything to ashes. He pierces through the elephants of the quarters with his trident and shakes the universe with his terrific dance known as *tāṇḍava*. At the same time he bestows welfare to all and is quite easy to please which has earned him the title of *Āśutoṣa*. He, on the one hand, wanders naked in the cremation grounds and is surrounded by the goblins and the evil spirits and on the other, in the *Śvetāsvatārā-Upaniṣad* and other *Śruti* literature, besides the *Śaiva-Siddhānta* of Kashmir, he happens to be the lord of the entire illusion, the cause of the universe, invisible and represents the supreme *tattva*.

Rudra in Vedic and Post-Vedic Literature

In the Vedic literature, the word Rudra has its own importance. He has been considered to be the father of Maruts (आ ते पितुर्मरुतां सुमन्मेतु।.... प्रजायेमहि रुद्रप्रजाभिः। *Rgveda*, I.23.1). He is supposed to take to many forms and can accomplish many tasks. Because of this Rudra is adored with his *gaṇas* (नमो गणेभ्यो गणपतिभ्यश्च वो नमो नमो। *Yajurveda*, 16.25). In some of the *Kaṇḍikas*, the word Rudra has been used in plural which possibly is indicative of the eleven Rudras (एकादश रुद्रा एकादशाक्षरा त्रिष्टुप।। *Taittirīya Saṁhitā*, 3.4.9.7). The same text sometimes mentions their number as thirty three (त्रिंशत्त्रयश्च गणिनो रुजन्तो दिवं रुद्राः पृथिवीं च सचन्ते।। *Taittirīya Saṁhitā*, 1.4.11.1). Rudra has also been associated with Agni (यो वै रुद्रः सोऽग्निः।। *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 5.2.4.13). He is also described to be associated with Agni as the lord of the animals.

In the *Rgveda*, Rudra is conceived to be of fair complexion and an illustrious youth, who roams about with his bow and arrows and when enraged he destroys the humans and the animals (*Rgveda*, X.114.5). His face is said to be dazzling like the sun or the gold (*Ibid.*, I.43.5). He is said to be adorned with gold ornaments, which illumine his body (*Ibid.*, II.33.9) and of all the ornaments of gold, necklace happens to be his favourite (अहन् निष्कं यजतं विश्वरूपं.... विभर्षि। *Ibid.*, II.33.10). He is also said to be of brown complexion (*Ibid.*, II.33.5). He has been adored to be youthful (*Ibid.*, II.33.11 and V.60.5). His body is said to be stable and well-developed (*Ibid.*, II.33.9). Of all other limbs of his body his arms and hands have been considered to bestow all the welfare to all.

The chariot is supposed to be the vehicle of Rudra and his attributes are described to be bow and arrow (*Ibid.*, V.4.11). The name of the bow of Rudra has been described to be Pināka (in the *Vājasneyī Saṁhitā*, 3.61), which is quite stable and his arrows are quite sharp and move with great speed. All other weapons held by him are also quite sharp (*Rgveda*, VII.46.2). He is also said to be holding *vajra* once (तवस्तमः तवसां वज्रवाहो। *Ibid.*, II.33.3). In the *Atharvaveda* (11.2.7), he has been described as the killer demon Ardhaka (Andhaka of the *Purāṇas*) (रुद्रेणार्धकं घातिना तेन मा समरामहि।।).

Formation of the Word Rudra

There is a small story in the *Taittirīya Saṁhitā* (1.5.1), according to which, there was once a war between the gods and the demons. At that point of time the gods entrusted the care of their riches to god Agni; subsequently Agni intended to usurp the riches. He then went with them. After the war, the gods intended to forcibly get back their treasure, which made him cry. Because of his so crying, he was known as Rudra—

देवासुरा संयत्ता आसन्। ते देवा.... अग्नौ वामं वसु सन्य
दधत्.... तदग्निर्न्यकामयत् तेनापाक्रमत् तद् देवा अवरुत्माना
अन्वायन्। तदस्य सदृसा अदित्सन्त। सः अरोधीत् यदरोधीत्
तद्रुद्रस्य रुद्रत्वम्।।

The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (11.6.3.7), conceived that the word *Rudra* has been a form of the root *Ruda* which means the one who weeps or makes other weep. It is further expressed therein that the soul and the life combined make Rudra because at the departure of the life from the body, the relatives are made to weep—

कतमे रुद्रा इति। दशमे पुरुषे प्राणाः। आत्मैकादशः। ते यदा
अस्मात् मर्त्याच्छरीराद् उत्क्रामन्ति अथ रोदयन्ति॥
यद्रोदयन्ति तस्माद् रुद्रा॥

The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (9.1.1.6-7) also has a story according to which, Brahmā once felt tired because of continuing creation and thereafter all the gods left his place. At this Prajāpati started weeping and two tears from his eyes dropped over the ground and from the same Rudras were created. The tears which further fell over Manu, Rudras of a hundred heads, a thousand eyes and carriers of a hundred quivers was born. Accordingly they were called Rudras, because they were born of weeping.

तद् यद् रुदितात् समभवन् तस्माद्भूराः॥

Throughout the Vedic period, he is identified with Agni and is also said to have given birth, by his contact with Pṛṣṇi (the earth), to the Maruts (the wind). In the *Atharvaveda*, it is stated that Bhava (Rudra) rules the sky, earth and atmosphere. In the same text, he is also called Sarva, Sahasrabāhu, Mahādeva, Paśupati and Rudra—the slayer of Andhaka. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, however, testifies that “Agni is god and is also called Sarva, Bhava, Paśupati, Rudra and Agni. These names other than Agni are *asanta*, while Agni is the gentlest.” The identity of Agni with Rudra is established in the *Mahābhārata*. In describing the birth of Skanda, it is stated in the Vana-parvan, that Svāhā, the wife of Agni, assumed on six consecutive days, the forms of the wives of six out of the seven ṛṣis and enjoyed the company of her husband, who has previously abandoned her and retired into the forest, because he could not secure for himself the company of the wives of the ṛṣis with whom he had fallen in love. The seed of Agni was gathered for six days by Svāhā and was deposited in a pit and covered with the *kuśa*-grass. On the sixth day, the seed assumed the form of Kumāra Skanda. It is also stated that Rudra who was dallying with his consort Umā for a long time was prayed by the gods to assume his other functions and he let drop his seed on earth. Agni was asked to take it and develop it, but its burning effect was so acute that he could not bear it and dropped it into the Gaṅgā and Skanda was born therefrom. Evidently Rudra, who happened to be the same as Agni, was the father of Skanda.

Though Rudra enjoyed a somewhat minor position in the Vedic literature, he emerged as a supreme deity in the Purāṇic period. In the subsequent literature, there appear several episodes in which his superiority over other gods is established. In the Purāṇic period he retains his position of being the destroyer and the terrific. Rudra has braided hair and matted locks and frequents cemeteries and performs awful rites. He is said to possess in every age the nature of Nārāyaṇa, in his *tāmasic* nature. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* also has an account describing the birth of Rudra according to which Prajāpati—the lord of creation and is also identified with the

sun, once desired to have a son; he consorted for the purpose with Uṣā and a son Kumāra was born. Soon after his birth the infant wept. The father asked him the reason for his weeping. Upon this, the infant replied that he did so since he had no name to take away the evil from him. Prajāpati then gave him the name of Rudra because he wept. Inasmuch as he gave the name, Agni became his form, for Rudra is Agni. Subsequently he also obtained from Prajāpati, the name of Sarva, Paśupati, Ugra, Aśani, Bhava, Mahādeva and Iśān. These names are associated with the *tattvas* of fire, water, plant, air, lightning, the rain, the moon and the sun. These are the forms of Agni. Almost similar accounts of the birth of Rudra are available in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and other Purāṇas. There is a painting in Srinagar Museum, in which Śiva has been depicted in *Aṣṭamūrti* form. This painting is the work of a Kangra artist and the forms of Rudra detailed above have been clearly drawn (Panthey, Saroj, *Iconography of Śiva in Pahari Paintings*, Delhi, 1987, p. 40).

Another factor in the creation of the Rudras is said to be *dravaṇa* or movement. This is true since Agni is another name of movement or the process of contraction called *prāṇa*. But prior to the emergence of the rhythmic movement in the primeval stages, movement was righteous, immeasured, uncontrolled, and the natural result was that movement was useless for the *yajña*. It was Agni which was destructive. Prior to the creation of Sūrya, motion was of this nature, but as soon as Sūrya came into existence as the model of rhythm, where the movements of all the rays from the beginning of the time to the end of it are predetermined and controlled; they are rhythmic and creative of *yajña*. The *Vāyu Purāṇa* gives a correct description of this phenomenon by saying that when the great god Rudra had created millions and billions of other Rudras, they were not able to further create because until Śiva ordained that they would be controlled by rhythmic activity and as such they would be permitted to take part in the *yajña* and became the rhythmic movements of time in the Manavantra.

यज्ञभाजो भविष्यन्ति सर्वे देव युगे सह।

मन्वन्तरेषु यं देवा भविष्यन्ती हच्छन्दजा॥

—*Vāyu Purāṇa*, 10.60

Rudra in the Purāṇic terminology is called *Aṣṭamūrti-Rudra*, i.e., he has eight forms. Kālidāsa has enumerated them as follows—

(i) Pṛthivī (*Sarvabīja-Prakṛti*), (ii) Jala (*Ya sṛstih Srasyarudraja*), (iii) Agni (*Vahati Vibhīhutam ya havih*), (iv) Vāyu (*Vāyu prāṇah pravantah*), (v) Ākāśa (sky), (vi) Sūrya, (vii) Candra, and (viii) Mānas.

Number of Rudras

The concept of Rudras was developed further and their number was taken to be eleven and the term *Ekādaśa Rudra* gained currency. The names of these eleven Rudras have been spelt out variously in the texts, as would be evident from the following tabulation—

<i>Amśubhedāgama</i>	<i>Viśvakarmā Śilpaśāstra</i>	<i>Rūpamaṇḍana</i>	<i>Aparājitapṛcchā</i>	<i>Matsya Purāṇa</i>
1. Mahādeva	Aja	Tatpuruṣa	Tatpuruṣa	Aja-Ekapada
2. Śiva	Ekapada	Aghora	Aghora	Ahribudhnaya
3. Śankara	Ahribudhnaya	Isāna	Isāna	Virupākṣa
4. Nīllohita	Virupākṣa	Vāmadeva	Vāmadeva	Revata
5. Isān	Revata	Mṛtyuñjaya	Sadyajata	Hara
6. Vijaya	Hara	Sadyajata	Mṛtyuñjaya	Bahurūpa
7. Bhīma	Bahurūpa	Kirṇākṣa	Kirṇākṣa	Tryambaka
8. Devadeva	Tryambaka	Ahribudhnaya	Ahribudhnaya	Savitā
9. Bhavodbhava	Sureśvara	Bahurūpa	Virupākṣa	Jayanta
10. Rudra	Jayanta	Tryambaka	Bahurūpa	Pinākī
11. Rudra	Aparājita	Virupākṣa	Tryambaka	Aparājita

Aja-Ekapāda and Ahribudhnaya were the Vedic deities mentioned several times in the *R̥gveda*. Sometimes they occur together and sometimes separately. The unborn Aja transcendent Avyaya Puruṣa is the Aja-Ekapāda principle. Literally, it means the one footed goat in which the Ekapāda stands for the absence of motion because with one foot there can be no movement. Aja has two meanings, *i.e.*, unborn or the one who leaps about. Both of these meanings are valid with reference to the unborn creator who is devoid of movement when he is one footed *i.e.*, at rest, prior to creation and secondly, when he becomes subject to motion regulated by the cosmic rhythm.

Śata-Rudra

There is also a concept of the *Śata-Rudra* form of Śiva. This form has been spelt out in the *Taittirīya Saṁhitā* of the *Kṛṣṇa-yajurveda* voicing innumerable salutations to the god, a glimpse of which is provided hereunder—

सहस्राणि सहस्रेषां ये रुद्रा अधिभूम्याम्। तेषां सहस्रयोजनेऽव
धन्वानि तन्मसि। अस्मिन्महत्त्यर्णवेऽन्तरिक्षे भवा अधि।
नीलग्रीवा शितिकण्ठा सर्वा अधः क्षमाचरा नील ग्रीवा।
शितिकण्ठा दिवं रुद्रा उपश्रिता। ये वृक्षेषु सस्मिंजरा
नीलग्रीवा विलोहिताः। ये भूतानधिपतयो विशिखासः
कपर्दिनः। ये अन्नेषु विविध्यन्ति पात्रेषु पिबतो जनान्।
ये पथा पथिरक्षय वृदा यव्यधः। ये तीर्थानि प्रचरन्ति
सुकावन्तो निषगिणः। य एतावन्तश्च भयांश्च दिशो
रुद्रा वितस्थिरे सहस्रं योजनेऽव धन्वानि तन्मसि॥

(Thousands of thousand-fold variety of Rudras are the Rudras on earth, whose bows stand unstrung, a thousand leagues away from us, as also the bows of similar myriads of Rudras in the vast ocean like expanse of firmament; Rudras, blue-throated and white necked moving in nether world below the earth, Rudras blue-throated and white necked denizens of heaven and those light green-hued on trees, blue-necked and of deep red hue; these overlords of spirits, with shorn trees or wearing *kaparda* locks, those that harm by the pollution of food and draughts in vessels, those that are the guardians of the paths of the mundane and the divine, those that store food to nourish and attack the untoward (inimical elements), those that move about in secret spots carrying daggers and swords, these aforesaid in thousand and even more, stationed enveloping all the directions, their bows unstrung stand a thousand leagues away from us.)

Rudra as Agni

It has already been pointed out that sometimes Rudra is equated with Agni (यो वै रुद्रः सो अग्निः। *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 5.2.4.13). Similarly, Agni is also known by the name of Sarva and Bhava, and both of them portray the terrific form of Agni. The most pleasing aspect of the fire is known as Agni who is supposed to bestow welfare on all.

अग्निर्वै स देवः। तस्यैतानि नामानि शर्व इति यथा प्राच्या
आचक्षते। भव इति यथा बाहीकाः। पशूनां पती रुद्रः अग्निरिति।
तानि अशान्तानि एव इतराणि नामानि। अग्निरित्येव शान्ततमम्।
तस्माद् अग्नय इति क्रियते स्विष्टकृत् इति।

—*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 1.7.3.8

Both Sarva and Bhava are supposed to be the terrific forms of Agni according to the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (6.1.3.8-18). These are also included in the name of Rudras. Evidently, therefore, Rudra portrays the terrific form of Agni. Agni on the one hand happens to be the priest of the *yajña* and transports the *yajña* to the gods. He also becomes the base of all the sacrificial practices and helps the sacrificer in having his desires fulfilled. He also enters into the bodies of all the human beings, generates life into them. He also has the all destructive form as well. When in rage, the god Agni reduces to ashes several gigantic buildings, reducing them to ashes. The vast forest are consumed by fire engulfing them besides the humans and the animals. The terrific form of fire is represented by Rudra.

While defining the *Śatarudriya* passages in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (9.1.1), it has been brought out, Agni is conceived with the terrific flames. He has also been described to be the destroyer of all, which earns for him the title of Rudra. The gods adore him to pacify him—

अथातः शतरुद्रियं जुहोति। अत्रैष सर्वोऽग्निः संस्कृतः। स एषोऽत्र रुद्रो देवता।
तस्मिन्देवा एतद् अमृतं रूपम् उत्तमम् दधुः। स एषोऽत्र दीप्यमानोऽतिष्ठद्ब्र-
मिच्छमानतस्माद्देवा अबिभ्युः यद्वै नो अयं हिंस्याद् इति।

The concept of treating Agni as Rudra did not originate in the *Brāhmaṇas*, but its seeds are traceable in the Vedic literature. In a passage in the *R̥gveda* (II.1.6), Rudra has been used as the adjective of Agni, which runs as follows—

त्वमग्ने रुद्रो असुरो महो दिवस्त्वं शर्धो मारुतं पृक्ष ईशिषे।

In the same passage of the *R̥gveda*, Agni has been described as *Asuragaṇa* of Maruts, preserver, and with several other adjectives. Sāyaṇa, on the other hand, is of the opinion that Agni is called as Rudra because he removes the pains of all—

रुद् दुःखं दुःखहेतुर्वा पापदिः। तस्य द्रावयिता एतन्नामको
देवो असि, रुद्रो वै एष यदग्निः इत्यादिषु (*Taittiriya Samhitā*, 5.4.3)
अग्नेः रुद्रशब्देन व्यवहारात्।

The same commentator further goes on to say that such of the people who do not adore Agni have ultimately to weep—

यद्वा त्वं रुद्रः। रीति। माम् अनिष्ट्वा नराः दुःखे पतिष्यन्ति।
रुद्रस्तादृशो असि।

The following passages from the *R̥gveda* also describe Rudra as Agni—

अग्निं सुम्नायं दधिरे पुरोजनाः वाजश्रवसमिह वुक्तबर्हिषः।
यतस्तुचः सुरुचं विश्वदेव्यं रुद्रं यज्ञानां साधदिष्टिमपसाम्॥

—*R̥gveda*, III.2.5

आ वो राजानम् अध्वरस्य रुद्रं होतारं सत्ययजं रोदस्योः।
अग्निं पुरा स्तनयित्लोः अचित्ताद् हिरण्यरूपम् अवसे कृणुध्वम्॥

—*Ibid.*, IV.3.1

The above passages not only bring out the association of Rudra with Agni but also mention him as *Ugra* and the fire has been described as the destroyer of the castles which are associated in the later Vedic literature for the destruction of Tripura—

य उग्र इव शर्यहा तिममभृगो न वंशगः।
अग्ने पुरो रुरोजिथ।

—*Ibid.*, VI.16.39

The passage has been interpreted by Sāyaṇa as under—

रुद्रो वै एष यदग्निरिति श्रुतेः रुद्रकृतमपि त्रिपुरदहनम् अग्नि-
कृतमेव इत्यग्निः स्तूयते।

A hymn of the *Atharvaveda* clearly speaks on the subject as follows—

य इमा विश्वा भुवनानि चक्लृपे तस्मै रुद्राय नमो अस्तु अग्नये।

Rudra, in the *Mahābhārata* as well as the *Purāṇas* has also been associated with Agni and lightning—

स वै रुद्रः स शिवः सोऽग्निः सर्वः स सर्वजित्।
वदन्त्यग्निं महादेवं तथा स्थाणुं महेश्वरम्।

—*Mahābhārata* (Anuśāsana-parvan, 60.38.46)

The same epic also projected the terrific forms of Śiva as lightning, scorching sun and terrific fire, while the soothing Agni stands for comforting the people—

द्वेतनू तस्य देवस्य वेदज्ञा ब्राह्मणा विदुः।
घोरामन्यां शिवामन्यां ते तनू बहुधा पुनः॥
उग्रा घोरा तनूर्या सा सोऽग्निर्विद्युत् स भास्करः।
आत्मनोऽर्धं तु तस्याग्निः सोमोऽर्धं पुनरुच्यते॥

—*Ibid.*, (Anuśāsana-parvan, 60.47-48)

In the *Vāyu Purāṇa* (21.75), Agni has been described as Kāla-Rudra. Since the sun too is the form of Agni, he too has been termed as Kāla-Rudra. In the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* at the time of dissolution, the destruction of the people with the hissing of Śeṣanāga and the *Kālagni* produced by the same has been equated with Rudra—

ततः कालाग्निरुद्रोऽसौ भूत्वा सर्वहरो हरिः।

Matted Locks of Hair of Rudra

In the *Rgveda* (I.114.1 and X.102.8), Rudra has been described to have the matted locks of hair over his head. This epithet possibly is indication of the smoke of the fire. When the fire burns in flames, the smoke is raised over them and the same has possibly been equated with the matted locks of hair of Rudra's head. Besides the dark clouds in the sky also provide an impression of the matted locks of the hair of Rudra and the appearing of the lightning in the clouds fully justify the epithet of Kapardi for Śiva (Refer to Pls. 5-10). In the *Mahākāvya*s and the *Purāṇas*, the title of Dhūrjati has also been applied for Śiva. In the Anuśāsana-parvan (160.50) of the *Mahābhārata*, Śiva has been equated with Agni, thus—

वदन्त्यग्निं महादेवं तथा स्थाणुं महेश्वरम्।
धूम्ररूपं च यत्तस्य धूर्जटीत्यत उच्यते॥

In the *Atharvaveda* (2.27.6; 6.13.1 and XI.2.17), Śiva has been described as *Nilasikhaṇḍin*, which means the one having blue hair. This blue hair has been interpreted to mean the smoke of fire. This aspect is highlighted in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (2.3.2.9), with a statement that when the fire is ignited, the smoke produced initially happens to be the form of Śiva. Equating Rudra with Agni, it is further emphasised in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, that as Rudra destroys the people at once, similarly the fire also destroys everyone engulfing him in the flames.

तद्यत्रैतत् प्रथमं समिद्धो भवति धून्यत इव। तर्हि हैष भवति रुद्रः। यथेमा
रुद्रः प्रजा अश्रयद्धयेव त्वत् निघातमिव त्वत् सचते एवमन्नमद्याम् इति।

In the *Taittirīya Samhitā* (16.1.66.8) of the *Kṛṣṇa-yajurveda*, Rudra has been described to have a blue throat (*Nilagrīva*). Rudra has already been described to be having the blue locks of

hair and now it has been brought out that he has a blue throat as well. This evidently serves as a background for the story, which makes Śiva of the Purāṇic time to consume poison that emerged from the churning of the ocean. The *Purāṇas* bring out the elaborate story in which gods and demons jointly churned the ocean, out of which fourteen treasures emerged—

लक्ष्मी कौस्तुभ पारिजातक सुरा धन्वन्तरी चन्द्रमा।
गावा कामदधा सुरेश्वर गजो रम्भादि दैत्याङ्गना॥
अश्वःसप्रमुखः विषं हरिधनु शंखोभूतं चाम्बधे।
रत्नानीति चतुर्दशः प्रतिदिनं देयात् सदा मङ्गलम्॥

Evidently the poison, according to the Purāṇic accounts also emerged.

Evidently all the treasures which emerged out of the churning of the ocean were of no consequence till they got rid of the horrible poison. They had possibly no other alternative except to approach Śiva, who happily consumed it, but at the objection of Pārvatī, the poison was caused to stay in the throat itself without moving down to the belly. As a result of this, the complexion of the throat was turned to blue.

In the Śānti-parvan (342.114) of the *Mahābhārata*, there is another story relating to Rudra's having a white throat. According to this story, after the destruction of the *yajña* of Dakṣa, the enraged Śiva took up his trident and shot it towards Nara-Nārāyaṇa who were performing *tapas* at Badrikāśrama. Nārāyaṇa returned it with a *humkāra*. At this, Rudra pounced upon them. Nārāyaṇa then caught hold of the neck of Śiva with his own hands as a result of which the throat of Śiva was turned white—

अथ रुद्र उपाधावत् तावृषी तपसान्वितौ।
तत एवं समुद्भूतं कण्ठे जग्राह पाणिना॥
नारायणः स विश्वात्मा तेनास्य शितिकण्ठता।

The story of the consuming the poison by Śiva has been repeated in several texts, some of which are brought out here—

- (i) तच्छ्रुत्वा देवदेवेशो लोकस्यास्य हितेप्सया।
अपिबत् तद् विषं रुद्रः कालानलसमप्रभम्।
यस्मात्तु नीलता कण्ठे नीलकण्ठस्ततः स्मृतः॥

—*Mahābhārata* (Ādi-parvan, 13.26)

- (ii) क्षीराब्धेर्मध्यमानाच्च विषं हालाहलं ह्यभूत्।
हरेण धारितं कण्ठे नीलकण्ठस्ततोऽभवत्॥

—*Agni Purāṇa*, 3.9

- (iii) निर्मय्यमानाद् उदधेरभूद्विषं महोल्बणं हालहलाह्वमप्रतः।
संभ्रान्तमीनोन्मकराहिकच्छपात् तिमिद्विपग्राहतिर्मिगिलाकुलात्॥
तदुग्रवेगं दिशि दिश्युपर्यधो विसर्पदुत्सर्पदसह्यमप्रति।
भीताः प्रजा दुद्रुवुरंग सेश्वरा अरक्ष्यमाणाः शरणं सदाशिवम्॥

ततः करतलीकृत्य व्यापि हालाहलं विषम्।
अभक्षयन्महादेवः कृपया भूतभावनः॥
तस्यापि दर्शयामास स्ववीर्यं जलकल्मषः।
यच्चकार गले नीलं तच्च साधोर्विभूषणम्॥

—*Śrīmadbhāgavata Purāṇa*, 8.7.18,19, 42-43

- (iv) अकाण्डब्रह्माण्डक्षयचकितदेवासुरकृपा-
विधेयस्यासीद् यस्त्रिनयनं विषं संहतवतः।
स कल्मषः कण्ठे तव न कुरुते न श्रियमहो,
विकारोऽपि श्लाघ्यो भुवनभयभङ्गव्यसनिनः॥

—*Śivamahimā Stotra*, 14

The episode of the consuming of poison by Śiva does not appear to be the exclusive imagination of the Purāṇic writers, but its seeds are very well traceable in the Vedic literature as would be evident from the following passage from the *R̥gveda* (X.136.7)—

वायुरस्मा उपामन्थत् पिनष्टि स्मा कुनत्रमा।
केशी विषस्य पात्रेण यद् रुद्रेणापिबत् सह॥

Rudra as Father of Maruts

Rudra also enjoys an important position of being the father of Maruts. In several contexts, he has been described as the father of Maruts (इदं पित्रे मरुतामुच्यते वचः॥ *R̥gveda*, I.114.6). They are stated to have been born from the womb of Pṛṣṇi as mother and Rudra as father. Being sons of Rudra, Maruts have also been called as रुद्राः or रुद्रियाः. The text of the *Bṛhaddevatā* has considered Rudragāṇas and Marudgāṇas as one and the same—

‘आ रुद्रात’ इति त्वस्यां (5.57.1) रुद्राणां संस्तुतो गणः।
मरुतां तु गणस्यैतत् नाम रुद्रा इति स्मृताः॥

—*Bṛhaddevatā*, 5.47

The following few verses composed by some unknown seer speak about the birth of Maruts from Rudra as father. But the embryo was cut off with *vajra* by Indra, as a result of which they were known as Maruts—

यथा रुद्रो मरुतां वै पितासीत् तथेतिहासः प्रदर्शयतेऽधुना॥1॥
शतक्रतोरसुरारेर्वधार्थं दितिस्तु गर्भं लभते स्म भर्तुः
शुश्रूषमाणाः किल तामथेन्द्रो मायाविदामग्रणी रन्ध्रदर्शी॥2॥
प्रकीर्णकेशी च दितिं प्रसुप्तामवेक्ष्य वज्री ह्यणुमात्ररूपः।
प्रविश्य कुक्षिं प्रविभेद गर्भं मा रोद रोदेति वदंस्तु गर्भम्॥3॥
भित्त्वा गर्भं निर्गते वै महेन्द्रे प्रबुद्धा सा रोदिति स्मार्तरूपा।
अत्रान्तरे त्वन्तरिक्षे तदासीद् जगज्जनित्री त्वखिलेशपत्नी॥4॥

गर्भस्य मातुश्च तदार्तनादं शुश्राव चाकाशगता यदृच्छया।
 सुरांगनानामवलोक्य वृन्दं कृपापरा साथ हरं ययाचे॥७॥
 एकैकमेषां लभतां शरीरं मदर्थमेतत् क्रियतां महेश।
 स्युश्चैव सर्वे तरुणाः सदैव स्वलंकृतास्ते मरुतस्तवैव॥९॥
 तथेति देवः प्रतिपन्नवाक्यो देव्या यथोक्तं प्रचकार सर्वम्।
 इत्थं तु सिद्धं मरुतां पितृत्वं जगद्गुरोर्देवदेवस्य शंभोः॥१२॥

In the *R̥gveda* (II.33.7), Rudra has also been called as Vṛṣabha (अभि नु मा वृषभ चक्षमीथा). In several other hymns, Pr̥ṣṇī, the mother of the Maruts has been called as a cow (प्र ये मे बन्वेषे गां वोचन्त सूरयः पृश्निं वोचन्त मातरम्। *Ibid.*, V.52.16).

Rudra as Isāna

Rudra has also been conceived in the *R̥gveda* (I.114.1), as Kṣadvīra which stands for Isāna. Besides this there is a passage which clearly speaks of Rudra as Isāna (अस्य भूरे भुवनस्य ईशानः).

Rudra as Mahādeva

Rudra has been described as Mahādeva (the great god) in the *Atharvaveda* (9.7.7) (मित्रस्य वरुणश्चांसौ त्वष्टां चार्यमा च देवणी महादेवो बाहुः॥). Accordingly Mitra and Varuṇa have been described to be the shoulders, Tvaṣṭā and Aryamā are the upper arms, and Mahādeva happen to be the arms of Vṛṣabha.

Rudra as Paśupati

Paśupati happens to be another epithet of Rudra, which has been used atleast ten times—

- (i) य ईशे पशुपतिः पशूनां चतुष्पदामुत यो द्विपदाम्।

—*Atharvaveda*, 2.34.1

- (ii) मरुतां पिता पशूनामधिपतिः स मामवतु।

—*Ibid.*, 5.24.12

This is possibly one of the earliest form of Śiva as Paśupati and he is found represented in seals from Harappa, Mohenjodaro and other Harappan sites. In one of the Harappan seals a human figure with horns over his head adorned with a tree branch, is found seated cross-legged and hands stretched straight over the knees. He is seated in meditation unmindful of the wild animals roaming about him freely. This figure has been identified as that of Śiva. Similar seals have been discovered from other Harappan sites as well.

Rudra as Tryambaka

In the *Śukla-yajurveda*, an other important epithet of Rudra, known as Tryambaka is found. In the *Vājasneyī Samhitā* (3.60), the following passage is found which is commonly known as the *Mahāmṛtyuñjaya Mantra*—

त्र्यम्बकं यजामहे सुगन्धिं पुष्टिवर्धनम्।
 उर्वारुकमिव बन्धनात् मृत्योर्मुक्षीय मामृतात्॥

The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (2.6.2.9), goes on to testify that Ambikā happens to be the sister of Rudra, because of which the name of Tryambaka was given to Rudra—

अम्बिका ह वै नाम अस्य स्वसा तया अस्यैष सह भागः
तद् यदस्यैष स्त्रिया सह भागः तस्मात् त्र्यम्बको नाम।

There is an interesting story in the *Anuśāsana-parvan* (140.26) of the *Mahābhārata*, according to which once Pārvatī jokingly closed the eyes of Śiva coming from behind. Since both the eyes of Śiva represented the sun and the moon, there was pitch dark in the universe with the result that a third eye appeared over the forehead of Śiva. Infact in the post-Vedic literature several types of stories were developed about the character of Śiva, which projected him in benevolent as well as terrific forms. In fact Rudra and Śiva represent the same god but in due course of time Rudra was taken to be his terrific form, though in the earlier literature he in this form was considered to be quite a benevolent one. On the one hand he is the destroyer of the universe, and on the other hand he is treated to be Āśutoṣa, who can be pleased quite easily. According to a Western scholar, Rudra was the god of the Aryans while Śiva was adored by the non-Aryans. According to the same school, "Aryans were quite independent in their religious approach upto the *R̥gvedic* times but gradually their gods penetrated into the non-Aryan deities as a result of which there had been intermingling of the two types of gods. This aspect becomes amply clear when it is found that the words of Rudra and Śiva are used in the *Vājasneyī Saṁhita* (6.61) at the same time with Śiva serving as the adjective of Rudra." But this ideology seems to have no justification because Śiva has been used for Rudra in the *R̥gveda* itself.

स्तोमं वो अद्य रुद्राय शिववसे क्षद्भीराय नमसा विधेम ते।
येभिः शिवः स्ववां एवयावभिर्दिवः सिषक्ति रुवयशा निकामभिः॥

—*R̥gveda*, X.92.9

Evidently the concept of Rudra becoming benevolent is of considerable antiquity and is not the result of the influence of any non-Aryan god over him.

Śiva and Tryambaka Homa

The *Tryambaka Homa* has been prescribed in the *Kṛṣṇa-yajurveda* and *Śukla-yajurveda*, as part of the *R̥jāsūya Yajña*. The form of Tryambaka (Rudra), that emerges from the Vedic literature goes on to testify that the sacrificer did not intend to invoke Rudra for the sacrifice because of his terrific and rigid form. Getting terrified the sacrificer drops the share of Rudra over an ant-hill or a tree possibly to keep Rudra away from the place of *yajña* or the human habitation. In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (2.6.2.10), it has been stated that the mouse has been prescribed as the vehicle of Rudra because when another animal is prescribed for him as a vehicle, it would get destroyed by coming in contact with him.

तस्मा आखुमेव पशूनामुपदिशति।
तेनो इतरान् पशून् न हिनस्ति॥
(पशूनां मध्ये आखुमेव पशुत्वेन उपदिशति। तेन कारणेन
इतरान् नृगवाश्वदीन् पशून् न हिनस्ति॥)

—*Sāyaṇa*

Mouse as the vehicle of Śiva was in the subsequent period transferred to Gaṇeśa, the son of Śiva. Evidently Rudra and Gaṇeśa represented initially one and the same god. Subsequently the personality of Rudra was separated from Gaṇeśa. In this *homa*, the form of Rudra has been so terrific that the *puroḍas* meant for him is not soaked in *ghee* because the animal from whose milk the *ghee* is formed, is put to harm.

अभिमान को ह रुद्रः पशून्त्स्याद यदञ्ज्यात् तस्मादनक्ता एव स्युः॥

—*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 2.6.2.6

5. Gaṇas of Rudra

In the first passage of the *Śatarudriya*, the qualities of Rudra have been spelt out. The next thirteen passages speak out Rudras. These Rudras are supposed to be the attendants of Rudra, whose sole function is to trouble the humans. These attendant Rudras are believed to possess the same qualities as are possessed by Rudra himself. Their number is innumerable and they dwell on earth, the ocean or the sky. Some of them are also said to be dwelling on the trees. Some of them are of brown colour, while some of them have the blue throats. Still others develop matted locks of hair over the head which are never arranged. They roam about near the tanks, lakes and rivers holding the bow and arrows in their hands. The rains are the arrows of the Rudras of the sky, those dwelling in the space have the wind as their weapon, those who reside on earth, spread various types of diseases. These Rudras are invoked for the destruction of the enemies—

तेभ्यो नमो अस्तु ते नो अवन्तु ते नो मृडयन्तु।

ते यं द्विष्मो यश्च नो द्वेष्टि तमेषां जम्भे वष्मः॥

—(16.65-66)

Evidently these Rudras are the goblins, *pretas* and evil spirits of the modern times, when the deserted houses, old thick trees, streams, tanks etc., are considered to be their abodes—

These Rudras, were in due course of time, called *gaṇas* and in the Purāṇic literature they were elaborately described. But the seeds of the concept of *gaṇas* are indeed available in the Vedic literature. The *Vājasneyī Samhitā* (23.19), mentions about them as follows—

गणानां त्वा गणपतिं हवामहे।

प्रियाणां त्वा प्रियपतिं हवामहे॥

These *gaṇas* of Rudra have been variously defined in the *Purāṇas*. Some of them are stated to be dwarfish, some of them are long in height, some are hunchbacks, some are fat. Some of them have the face of a tiger, some are elephant faced, some are goat faced and some are sheep faced. The description of these *gaṇas* as available in the *Matsya Purāṇa* (153.531-537) is as follows—

यावन्तस्ते कृशा दीर्घाः स्थूला ह्रस्वा महोदयाः।

व्याघ्रेभवदना केचित् केचिन्मेषाजरूपिणः॥

अनेकप्राणिरूपाश्च ज्वालास्या कृष्ण पिंगलाः।

सौम्या भीमाः स्मितमुखाः कृष्ण पिंगलजटासटाः॥

नाना विहंग वदना नानाश्चान्ये विरूपिणः।
 कौशेयचर्मवसना नग्नाश्चान्ये विरूपिणः॥
 गोकर्णा गजकर्णाश्च बहु वक्त्रेक्षणोदराः।
 बहुपादा बहुभुजा दिव्यनानास्त्र पाणयः॥
 अनेक कुसुमापीडा नाना व्याल विभूषणाः।
 विचित्र वाहनारूढा दिव्यरूपा वियच्चराः॥
 वीणावाद्यरवाघुष्टां नाना स्थानक नर्तकाः।

In the same text, it has been pointed out that the *gaṇas* with deformed appearance surprised Pārvatī, when she arrived in the abode of Śiva and she asked him about them—

गणेशः कति संख्याता किंनामानः किमात्मकाः।
 एकैकशो मम ब्रह्मधिष्ठता ये पृथक् पृथक्॥

—*Matsya Purāṇa*, 153.538

To this, Śiva replies that “the *gaṇas* are crores in number, which cannot be counted. They pervade in the entire universe. They are found in sacred places, on the roads, deserted houses, old trees and the bodies of the Dānavas. They eat different types of food. Some of them consume the fire, some of them consume the seafoam, some of them consume the smoke, honey, blood, while some of them live on inhaling the air alone. They indulge in a varied types of functions, which are beyond description.

कोटि संख्या ह्यसंख्याता नाना विख्यात पौरुषाः।
 जगदा पूरितं सर्वैरेभिभीमै महाबलैः॥
 सिद्धक्षेत्रेषु रथ्यासु जीर्णोद्यानेषु वेश्मसु।
 दानवानां शरीरेषु बालेषून्मत्तकेषु च॥
 एते विशन्ति मुदितः नाना हार विहारिणः।
 ऊष्मपाः फेनपाश्चैव धूमया मधुपायिनः॥
 रक्तपा सर्वभक्षश्च वायुषा ह्यम्बुभोजनाः।
 गेयनृत्योपहाराश्च नाना वाद्यरवप्रियाः।
 न ह्येषां वै अनन्तत्वाद् गुणान् वक्तुं हि शक्यते॥

—*Matsya Purāṇa*, 153.539-42

The *Vāyu Purāṇa* goes on to testify that the Rudras mentioned in the *Śatrudrīya Sūkta* are the *gaṇas* only. The same text contains a story (10.45-62), according to which Brahmā once asked Nīlāhita-Mahādeva to engage himself in creation. At this lord Mahādeva created eternal mind-sons who possessed the same types of qualities as he himself possessed. All of them were clad in skin, had green hair, terrible light and were holding *kapāla* (skulls). They had many hands, mouths and eyes. Witnessing the terrific creation, Brahmā was upset and he asked Śiva to create good looking beautiful and mortal creatures. Śiva then informed Brahmā, that such a type of creation was beyond him and if necessary Brahmā could himself do it. He further said,

“The deformed and Nīllohita creatures created by him will be known by the name of Rudras or Śatrudras.”

In the Śānti-parvan of the *Mahābhārata* (284.60-182), Yakṣa, while adoring Śiva, also bows in reverence to the Rudras who dwell in the deserted houses, old trees, crossings. These Rudras or the *gaṇas* are also mentioned in the following *Purāṇas*—

- (i) *Vāyu Purāṇa*, 54.25-30; 69.240-256.
- (ii) *Skanda Purāṇa* (Kāśī Khaṇḍa), 53.8-12.
- (iii) *Varāha Purāṇa*, 10.44-50.
- (iv) *Padma Purāṇa* (Sṛṣṭi Khaṇḍa), 40.476-496.
- (v) *Liṅga Purāṇa*, 1.103.13.34.
- (vi) *Harivaṁśa Purāṇa*, 2.109.68.84.
- (vii) *Viṣṇudharmottara*, 1.69.6.8.
- (viii) *Brahma Purāṇa*, 213.93-99.
- (ix) *Varada Purāṇa*, 91.10-25.
- (x) *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, 5.11.34-36.

Destruction of Dakṣa's Yajña by Rudra

The Birth of Rudra

There is an interesting account available in the *Brāhmaṇa* literature about the birth of Rudra. There is a story available in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (1.4.1-3) and *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (3.3.9), according to which Prajāpati once was attracted with passionate advances towards his daughter Uṣās. This enraged the gods, because Prajāpati was going to perform a deplorable sin. He was, therefore, to be punished. But none of the gods could dare to do so. Therefore, all of them assembled the terrific aspect available in each one of them as a result of which Rudra was created—

प्रजापतिर्वै स्वां दुहितरमभ्यधावद् तं देवा अपश्यन्। अकृतं
वै प्रजापतिः करोति इति तम् ऐच्छन् एनम् अरिष्यति। एतम्
अन्योन्यं न अविन्दन्। तेषां या एवधारेतमाः तन्वः आसन एकधा
समभरन्। ताः संभृता एष देवः अभवत् यस्यैतत् भूतवद् नाम
तं देवा अब्रुवन् प्रजापतिः अकृतं अकः विध्य एनम्।

—*Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, 3.3.9

In the above passage of *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, Rudra has been conceived to be the terrific one while the other gods are supposed to be benevolent ones. In another passage of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (9.1.1.6-7), the tears of Brahmā, which flew in anger and fell over *Manyu*, gave birth to Rudra and those which fell on the ground produced the *gaṇas* of Rudra.

Destruction of Yajña

According to the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* (Bāla-kāṇḍa, 66.9-10) and the *Mahābhārata* (Śānti-parvan, 18.1-23), the *yajña* of Dakṣa was destroyed by Rudra himself—

दक्षयज्ञवधे पूर्व धनुरायम्य वीर्यवान्।
विध्वंस्य त्रिदशान् रोषात् सलीलमिदमब्रवीत्॥
यस्मात् भागार्थिनो भागं नाकल्पयत मे सुराः।
वरांगाणि महार्हाणि धनुषा शतयामि वः॥

—*Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, 1.66.9-10

The same story is repeated in the Śānti-parvan (Chapters, 383-384) of the *Mahābhārata*, *Śrīmadbhāgavata Purāṇa* (4.2-5), *Vāyu Purāṇa* (Chapter 30), *Padma Purāṇa* (Chapter 6) and *Kūrma Purāṇa* (Chapter 15) and several other texts. But in these texts, the *yajña* of Dakṣa is not at all destroyed by Rudra himself. In stead, at the instance of Pārvatī, Śiva in order to remove her mental agony, creates a terrific *gaṇa* named Virabhadra from his mouth or the lock of his hair. Pārvatī too creates Bhadrakali from her body, who represented her terrific form. Thereafter Gaṇeśa and Virabhadra, accompanied with other *gaṇas* of Śiva, destroy the *yajña* of Dakṣa. It is pointed out by *Vāyu Purāṇa*, that Dakṣa, on finding the destruction of his sacrifice, tries to flee from the scene turning himself to the form of an antelope, into the sky. But Virabhadra severed his head, as a result of which the body of Dakṣa fell down on earth. In the Śānti-parvan of the *Mahābhārata* (Chapter 283) and *Vāyu Purāṇa* (Chapter 30), when Pārvatī finds the gods who were invited by Dakṣa to participate in the *yajña*, moving in their respective planes, then she asks Śiva about the reason for not inviting him to the sacrifice. Śiva then clearly tells her that in ancient times the gods had resolved not to invite him for participation in any *yajña* and the same tradition was continuing—

सुरैरेव महाभागे पूर्वमेतदनुष्ठितम्।
यज्ञेषु सर्वेषु मम न भाग उपकल्पितः॥
पूर्वोपायोपपन्नेन मार्गेन वर वर्णिनि।
न मे सुरा प्रयच्छन्ति भागं यज्ञेषु धर्मतः॥

This caused considerable mental agony to Pārvatī. She thinks, "In case even the petty gods receive their share of the *yajña*, then why should Śiva be deprived of the same. Therefore in order to remove the mental agony of Pārvatī, Śiva thinks of the destruction of the sacrifice of Dakṣa.

In the *Vāyu Purāṇa*, it has been brought out that Dakṣa, turning himself to the form of an antelope flies in the sky and Virabhadra follows him and severs his head. This aspect had been quite popular during the time of Kālidāsa, which was patronised by him in his play, the *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*—

कृष्णसारे ददच्चक्षु त्वयि चधिन्य कार्मुके।
मृगानु सारिणं साक्षात् पश्यामीव पिनाकिनम्॥

6. Prajāpati/Brahmā

Unity in diversity is the nature of the human mind. While adoring the other Vedic gods, it was but natural on the part of the Vedic seers to concentrate also upon the god who was considered as the creator of the universe. Therefore, in the tenth Maṇḍala of the *R̥gveda*, the Vedic seers seem to have been inclined towards the emotional god of creation. Though in the *R̥gveda*, the word Viśvakarmā has been used (VIII.87.2 and X.170.4), twice as the creator of the world besides Indra and Sūrya (येनेमा विश्वा भुवनान्याभूता विश्वकर्मणा विश्वदेव्यावता।), but in the (X.81 and 82) passage, the name of Viśvakarmā has been mentioned, which represents the highest force in the group of the divine gods. He has been described as the father of the human beings, who has eyes all-round (X.81.1). He has arms and the faces all-round. He alone is said to have created the earth and the sky—

विश्वतश्चक्षु रुतः विश्वतोमुखो विश्वतो बाहुरुतविश्वतपस्यात्।
सं बाहुभ्यां धमति सं पतत्रैद्यावाभूमी जनयन् देव एकः॥

—*R̥gveda*, X.81.2

Viśvakarmā happens to be extremely intelligent, active, creator of the universe, Dhātā, highly intellectual. He is quite well aware of the several *lokas*. He himself bears several names, which indirectly means that all the gods represent him. The entire universe ultimately merges in him—

विश्वकर्मा विमना आद्विहाया धाता विधाता परमीत संदृक्॥

—*Ibid.*, X.82.2

यो न पिता जनिता यो विधाता धामानि वेद भुवनानि विश्वा।
यो देवानां नामधा एक एव तं सम्प्रश्नं भुवना यन्तमन्या॥

—*Ibid.*, X.82.3

Viśvakarmā has also been described to be the holder of all the *lokas* in the waters as well all the gods—

तमिदगर्भं प्रथमदध्न आपो यत्र देवा समयच्छन्त विश्वे।
अजस्य नामावध्येकमर्पितं यस्मिन् विश्वानि भुवनानि तस्युः॥

—*Ibid.*, X.82.6

According to the Nāradiya Sūkta (*R̥gveda*, X.129), there was water everywhere before creation. It is, therefore, quite natural for the elements of seed to sprout in the same. In the 121st Sūkta of the tenth Maṇḍala of the *R̥gveda*, the seed has been described to be of golden colour and was given the name of हिरण्यगर्भः॥ Prajāpati ultimately was equated with the same Hiranyagarbhā. The Hiranyagarbhā Sūkta eulogises Prajāpati in an elaborate manner. With the single exception all the hymns of this Sūkta end with the terminology कस्मैदेवाय हविषा विधेम॥ Sāyaṇa and other commentators have interpreted 'क' as the pleasure. Because Prajāpati has the nature to please everyone, the term 'क' is used for him. Thus the word 'कस्मै' stands for Prajāpati

apparently. The tradition of treating 'क' as Prajāpati travelled down to the *Brāhmaṇa* literature as well. कं वै प्रजापतिः, कमेवैष प्रजाप्यः कुरुते॥ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 2.5.1.11; 6.2.2.5; 6.4.3.4; *Kauśītakī Brāhmaṇa*, 5.4; *Taittirīya Saṁhitā*, 1.7.6). In the *Purāṇas* like the *Śrīmadbhāgavata* and others, the letter 'क' is undoubtedly used to denote Prajāpati. Not only that, the word Prajāpati was used for Dakṣa as well (नारायणश्च विश्वात्मा न कस्याध्वर मीयतुः॥ 4.6.3). But the Western scholars have interpreted the term to mean that the above passage seeks to know as to which of the gods should be given the offering. According to this Sūkta, the universe was submerged in the vast expanse of water. With the combination of *tejas* and *tattva*, a womb developed therein. From that womb a force was born which happened to be the best of the the Vedic gods—

आपो ह यद् बृहतीर्गर्भमायन् गर्भं वधाना जनयन्ती रग्निम्।
ततो देवानां समवर्ततासुरेकः कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम॥

The above Sūkta relating to Prajāpati is also found in fragments in the *Śukla-yajurveda*. The above passage is available in the *Vājasneyī Saṁhitā* (27.25) as well.

The Prajāpati-Sūkta of the *Ṛgveda* starts with "हिरण्यगर्भा समवर्तताग्नेः" It is brought out in the *Atharvaveda* (4.2.8), that the son who was initially born of आपः, his upper complexion was golden. With this *mantra* too the *Ṛgvedic* terminology of कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम॥ was added—

आपो वत्सं जनयन्तीर्गर्भमग्ने समैरयन्।
तस्योत जायमानस्य उल्ब आसीत् हिरण्यमयः
कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम॥

In the *Brāhmaṇa* texts, the process of creation starts with Hiraṇyagarbhā. It was all water before creation from which a golden egg was born. It broke after a long time and Prajāpati emerged out of it. The upper part of the egg was turned into the sky and the lower part was turned into the earth (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 11.1.6.1, 2). The basic idea of calling the universe as Brahmanḍa is enshrined in this concept. In the subsequent stories relating to the creation of the universe, Hiraṇyagarbhā and Prajāpati were separated from each other. Hiraṇyagarbhā happens to be the material aspect of Prajāpati, because Prajāpati is born out of Hiraṇyagarbha. But in the *Ṛgveda* both Prajāpati and Hiraṇyagarbha represent one and the same aspect.

In the Hiraṇyagarbha Sūkta of the *Ṛgveda* (X.121), it has been brought out that Prajāpati was born first of all. He happens to be the lord of the universe and contains both the earth and the sky. He created an awareness (चेतना) among the creatures and infused life in them. The birth and death of the creatures are dependant upon him. He happens to be the lord of all including those having two feet or four feet, because of his glory. All the mountains, oceans and the rivers are enshrined in his body. The directions are his arms. He is the lord of all the gods and is the best of them. The earth and the sky were created by him. Except him there is nothing else in this universe—

हिरण्यगर्भः समवर्तताग्रे भूतस्य जातः पतिरेक आसीत्।
 स दधार पृथिवीं द्यामुतेमां कस्मैदेवाय हविषा विधेम॥
 या आत्मदा बलदा यस्य विश्व उपासते प्रशिषं यस्य देवाः।
 यस्यच्छायाऽमृतं यस्यमृत्युः कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम॥
 यः प्राणतो निमिषतो महित्व एक इद्राजा जगतो बभूव।
 यः ईशे अस्य द्विपद चतुष्पदः कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम॥
 यस्येमे हिमवन्तो महित्वा यस्य समुद्रं रसया सहाहुः।
 यस्येमे प्रविशो यस्य बाहु कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम॥
 यो देवेष्वाधिदेव एक आसीत् कस्मै देवा हविषा विधेम॥

During the Vedic period itself, there developed a unified approach about Viśvakarmā and Prajāpati. In the *Śukla-yajurveda* (12.61 and 18.43), the epithet of Viśvakarmā had been used for Prajāpati. But evidently these hymns of the *R̥gveda* (X.81 and X.82) have been repeated in the *Śukla Yajurveda*, but in some of the exclusive hymns of the *Yajurveda*, the same aspect has been highlighted.

A story in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (2.3.1.4-10), describes about Prajāpati, getting attracted towards his own daughter. After the *R̥gveda*, the same story has been repeated in the *Purāṇas* and other post-Vedic texts. This particular incident brought down the popularity of Brahmā to a considerable extent. It may be recalled here that Brahmā had been quite popular initially and this popularity travelled from the Epics to the *Purāṇas*, though it was considerably subdued. In many of the texts it has been brought out that it was Brahmā who granted boons to the demon king Rāvaṇa, who had performed his *tapas* together with Vibhiṣaṇa and Kumbhakarna and these boons could not be revoked by anyone. Rather Viṣṇu had to incarnate on earth for the destruction of Rāvaṇa, who had created great terror on earth and had been imprisoned the gods, humiliating Indra and Kubera. There is also a story in the *Purāṇas* according to which Brahmā was removed from reverence of the people as a deity because of a curse pronounced on him by his own son Nārada. This could be the reason as to why one comes across a negligible number of shrines in India, which were dedicated to Brahmā or Prajāpati. There appears to be some stage in the Indian religious thought when Brahmā was held in high esteem and adored by the people. But gradually there appeared a stage when there was an alround decline in his popularity and he was relegated to the background, and all his feats like the rescue of Manu in the form of Matsya (fish incarnation), Tortoise incarnation, and the boar incarnation, when he rescued the earth from the deep waters, were attributed to Viṣṇu, depriving him of the credit. The stage at which all this happened, would be difficult to spell out, but possibly the process started at quite an early stage which could be due to his objectionable relation with his own daughter which is reflected in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* as under—

प्रजापतिहं वै स्वां दुहितरम् अभिदध्यौ दिवं व उषसं वा।
 मिथुनी एनया स्यामिति। तां संबभूव। तद्वै देवानामाग आस। य
 इत्थं स्वां दुहितरम् अस्माकं स्वसारं करोति इति। ते ह देवा ऊचुः

यो अयं देवः पशूनामीष्टे अतिसन्धं व अयं चरति, य इत्थं स्वां
दुहितरम् अस्माकं स्वसारं करोति। विध्य एनम्। तं रुद्रो अभ्यायत्य
विव्याध। तथेन्नूनं तदास॥

—*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 2.3.1.7-10

(Prajāpati felt attracted towards his own daughter who is called Uṣā or Dhyau. He wanted to cohabit with her, which enraged the gods, saying, "He behaves with our sister and his own daughter in such a manner." They then reported the matter to Rudra, the lord of the animals to punish him. Rudra at once injured Brahmā with his arrow.)

This is, however, certain that this story relates to some natural scene, but it is difficult to trace its origin. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* in another context points out that Uṣā or Dhyau happens to be the daughter of Prajāpati. In fact, Prajāpati is also associated with Sūrya in his earliest form of Sūrya. In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (2.3.1.7), it has been brought out that Sūrya is Prajāpati and his rays are the gods.

एते वै विश्वेदेवाः रश्मयः योऽथ यत्परं भाः स प्रजापतिः।

Uṣā happens to be daughter of Sūrya or Prajāpati because she is born of him. She appears before the sunrise; the sun appears after some time and evidently it looks as if the sun or Prajāpati follows her. The race continues for the whole day. In the evening, after the sunset the lustre of the evening continues to cover the western direction. It then appears that the sun has moved on leaving the evening lustre behind. With the merging of the sun rays in the evening with the sun disc it could be interpreted that the Sūrya or Prajāpati has caught hold of her daughter. In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (6.1.3.8), Prajāpati has been described as the husband of Uṣā (स भूतानां पतिः अथ सा या उषा पत्नी सा॥). The same interpretation of the story of Uṣā has been provided by Kumārilabhaṭṭa and other commentators. There is a hymn in the *Vājasneyi Samhitā* (3.10), which reads as—(सजुवदेन सवित्रा सजुरुषसा इन्द्रवत्या जुषाणः सूर्यो वेतु॥). इन्द्रवत्या उषसा has been interpreted to mean that Indra is Savitā who unites with Uṣās.

सवितमतप्रसवाय सेन्द करोति। तद् उषसा
मिथुनं करोति तत् सूर्याय प्रत्यक्षं जुहोति॥

The remote reflection of the same story is also available in some of the *Rgvedic* hymns (X.61.5-7), but possibly the girl of these hymns happens to be Pṛthivī and Prajāpati is Dhyau. The relevant passages of the *Rgveda* are reproduced hereunder—

- (i) पुनस्तदा वहति यत्कनाया दुहितुः आ अनुमृतम् अनर्वा॥15॥
- (ii) मध्या यत्कर्त्तुम् अभवद् अभीके कामं कृण्वाने पितरि युवत्याम्॥16॥
- (iii) पिता यत्स्वां दुहितरम् अधिष्कन् क्षम्या रेतः संजग्मानो न्यषिञ्चत्॥17॥

In the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, the same story appears in a somewhat modified and developed form, but the same story though retaining its original character, penetrates into the astrological

regions. According to this story Prajāpati was attracted towards his own daughter, who is called as Dhyau or Uṣā by the people. She turned herself in the form of a doe and Prajāpati took to the form of a buck and followed her. The gods witnessed the scene and observed that Prajāpati was going to commit a sin. They intended to punish him. But none of them was competent enough to do so. Therefore, they assembled the rage aspect in them and Rudra emerged out of the same. Finding Rudra having been born out of the *tejas* of the gods, he was given the name of Bhuta by them. The gods then told him that Prajāpati is going to commit a sin and you injure him with an arrow. He said, "All right. But you first of all give me a boon." He was told, "You will rule over the animals completely." He said, "All right." That is why Rudra is called Paśupati. He then injured Prajāpati in the form of a buck with an arrow, after which, he flew in the sky. He is called *Mṛga*. The one who followed the *Mṛga* is called the *Mṛgavyādhā*. The doe is Rohiṇī and the arrow happens to be Trikāṇḍā—

प्रजापतिर्वै स्वां दुहितरम् अभ्यध्यायद्। दिवमित्यन्ते आहुः उषसमित्यन्ये।
ताम् ऋष्यो भूत्वा रोहितं भूताम् अभ्यैत्। तं देवा अ पश्यन्। अकृतं वै प्रजापतिः
करोतीति। ते तपैच्छन् य एनम् आरिष्यति। एतम् अन्योन्यस्मिन् नाविन्दन्। तेषां
या एव घोरतमाः तन्वः आसन् ता एकधा समभरन्। ताः संभृता एष देवः अभवत्
तदस्य एतद् भूतवन्नाम भवति। तं देवा अब्रुवन् अयं वै प्रजापतिः अकृतम् अकः।
इमं विध्य इति। स तथेत्यब्रवीत्। स वै वो वरं वृणा इति। वृणीष्वेति। स
एतमेव वरम् अवृणीत पशूनाम् आधिपत्यम्। तदस्यैतत् पशुमन्नाम भवति। तम्
अभ्यायत्य अविध्यत्। स विद्धः ऊर्ध्वं उदप्रपतत्। तमेतं मृग इत्याचक्षते। य उ
एव मृगव्याधः स उ एव। स या रोहिन् सा रोहिणी। य एव इषः त्रिकाण्डा
स एव इषुस्त्रिकाण्डा।

—Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, 3.3.3

Lord Matsya initially tries to make Manu understand that the creation has been infested with *Rajoguṇa* and is quite mysterious. All her secrets are beyond the understanding of ordinary human beings and particularly the actions of gods could be understood by them alone and not by the humans. Thereafter he discusses the spiritual aspect of the story emphasising that Brahmā happens to be the creator of all the Vedas. He himself appears in the form of the Vedas. Gāyatrī, being the part of the Vedas, is considered to have been born of Brahmā. The same Gāyatrī is known by the name of Sāvitrī, Sarasvatī, Brahmāṇī and Bhārātī. The union of both of them is in a divine form. Therefore, wherever Brahmā resides, Sarasvatī is always there and wherever Sarasvatī dwells, Brahmā is always available there. None is separate from the other, because Brahmā happens to be the treasure of knowledge and Sarasvatī happens to be Gāyatrī. As such there is no sin involved in the union of both them—

अन्यच्च सर्ववेदानामधिष्ठाता चतुर्मुखः।
गायत्री ब्रह्मणस्तद्वत् अंगभूता निगद्यते॥७॥
अमूर्तं मूर्तम् वापि मिथुनं तत् प्रचक्षते।
विरिचिर्यत्र भगवान् तत्र देवी सरस्वती।
भारती यत्र यत्रैव तत्र तत्र प्रजापतिः॥८॥

यथातपो न रहितश्छायया दृश्यते क्वचित्।
 गायत्री ब्रह्मणः पार्श्वं तथैव न विमुञ्चति॥९॥
 वेदराशिः स्मृतो ब्रह्मा सावित्री तदधिष्ठिता।
 तस्मान्न दोषः कश्चित् स्यात् सावित्रीगमने विभो॥१०॥

—*Matsya Purāṇa*, 4.7-10

There is no doubt that there could be no other better justification for the objectionable relationship of Prajāpati with his own daughter. But at the same time this interpretation does not appear to be without any basis or superfluous, on the other hand, it is based on the historical development of the concept of Prajāpati and supported by the literary evidence. Because of the unity in approach between Brahmā and Sarasvatī, *Matsya Purāṇa* does not define Sarasvatī as the wife of Brahmā, but as an associate. Accordingly Brahmā himself converted half of his own form as a male and the other half as a female—

ततः संजप्तस्तस्य भित्त्वा देहमकल्मषम्।
 स्त्रीरूपमर्धमकरोद् अर्धं पुरुषरूपवत्।
 शतरूपा च सा ख्याता सावित्री च निगद्यते।

—*Matsya Purāṇa*, 1.30-31

Ordinarily speaking, the union of a female and a male couple is essential for the creation, whether they are brothers and sisters like Yama and Yamī or Prajāpati and Sarasvatī, who were interpreted to be the father and the daughter. Therefore, in order to remove this possibility in the *Matsya Purāṇa* and *Manusmṛiti* and the subsequent literature, such relationship was objected to and they were described to be two inseparable parts of one and the same element—

द्विधा कृत्वात्मनो देहम् अर्धेन पुरुषोऽभवत्।
 अर्धेन नारी तस्यां स विराजमसृजत् प्रभुः॥

In the *Brahma Purāṇa*, which possibly contains the oldest forms of the Purāṇic stories, the story of Prajāpati and his daughter is based on the story of the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, but the composer has replaced the daughter of Brahmā with Saṁjñā the daughter of Tvaṣṭā—

कश्यपस्य सुतो ज्येष्ठ आदित्यो लोकविश्रुतः।
 तस्य पत्नी उषा ख्याता त्वाष्ट्री त्रैलोक्यसुन्दरी॥

—*Brahma Purāṇa*, 86.3

The *Brahma Purāṇa* narrates the story of Uṣā and Prajāpati as follows—

सर्वासामुत्तमां काञ्चित् निर्ममे लोकसुन्दरीम्।
 तां दृष्ट्वा विकृता बुद्धिर्ममासीत् मुनिसत्तम॥
 गृह्यमाणा मया बाला सा मां दृष्ट्वा पलायिता।
 मृगीभूता तु सा बाला मृगोऽहमभवं तदा॥
 मृगव्याधोऽभवच्छंभुः धर्मसंरक्षणाय च।
 धनुर्गृहीत्वा सशरमीशोऽपि मृगरूपिणम्।

मामुवाच वधिष्ये त्वां मृगव्याधस्तदा हरः।
तत्कर्मणो निवृत्तोऽहं प्रादां कन्यां विवस्वते॥

—*Brahma Purāṇa*, 102.3-7

The girl towards whom Prajāpati gets attracted, at the interference of Rudra, the *Mṛgavyādha*, is given away as the wife of Vivasvān. Uṣā happens to be the daughter of Prajāpati and the wife of Vivasvān also bears the same name. Therefore, the mystery about Uṣā's becoming the spouse of Vivasvān can be well understood.

Dakṣa Prajāpati

During the stage of the Purāṇas, the word Prajāpati came to be used as an adjective, which was mainly used for Brahmā as well as the sages who were associated with the creation. In the *Padma Purāṇa* (4.32), Bhṛgu, Pulaha, Pulastya, Kratu, Aṅgirā, Marici, Atri, Vasiṣṭha and Dakṣa, were considered to be nine Prajāpatis.

पुलस्त्योऽत्रिर्वसिष्ठश्च क्रतुश्च पुलहस्तथा।
भृगुर्मरीचिर्दक्षश्च अंगिरा च तपोधनः।
प्रजापतयः पुराणेष्वेते नव विनिश्चिताः॥

In the above list, the adjective Prajāpati has been specifically added to the name of Dakṣa. Not only this, wherever the name of Dakṣa has been mentioned in the Purāṇas, the word Prajāpati is always found added to the same. In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (2.4.4.2), it has been stated that Prajāpati is called Dakṣa. The *yajña* called *Dākṣāyaṇa* was initially performed by Prajāpati and this is the reason for its being called as *Dākṣāyaṇa*—

स वै दक्षो नाम तद् यदनेन सः अग्रे अयजत तस्माद् दाक्षायणो नाम।

In the Purāṇas, one can find the usage of the words Dakṣa and Prajāpati, quite separately at times, but in the Brāhmaṇas literature, both of them have been used collectively. In the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* (2.3.5), it has been brought out that Prajāpati had thirty-three daughters, who were given away in marriage to Soma. But he felt more attached towards Rohiṇī. The other girls were enraged and they went to Prajāpati with a complaint. When Soma went to Dakṣa's place to get them back, Prajāpati advised Soma to treat all of them equally. But when Soma did not listen to him, Prajāpati created a deadly disease which made Soma quite lean and thin—

प्रजापतेः त्रयस्त्रिंशद् दुहितर आसन्। ताः सोमाय राज्ञे अददात्। तासां रोहिणीमुपैत्। ता ईर्ष्यन्तीः पुनरगच्छन्। ताः अन्वैत। ताः पुनरयाचत। ता अस्मै न पुनरददात्। सः अब्रवीत् ऋतममीष्य यथा समावच्छ उपैष्याम्यथ ते पुनर्दास्यामि इति। स ऋतमामीत्। ता अस्मै पुनरददात्। तासां रोहिणीमेवोपैत्। त यक्ष्म आच्छेद्। राजानं यक्ष्म आरद् इति।

—*Taittirīya Saṃhitā*, 2.3.5

The above story has also been repeated in the Śālya-parvan (35.45-62) of the *Mahābhārata* almost similarly, but the place of Prajāpati has been taken by Dakṣa and the number of the

daughters has been reduced from thirty-three to twenty-seven who are conceived as the different constellations. By taking a bath over the confluence of the river Sarasvatī and the ocean on one (at Prabhāṣa), is relieved of half of the ailments. Dakṣa then arranges for the decline of the moon for a fortnight and the increase in the bright fortnight. The same story is repeated in the *Bhāgavata* (4.6.3) and other Purāṇas almost similarly.

Birth of Brahmā

Brahmā is usually known as *Svayambhū* or self born. This epithet seems to be quite appropriate taking into account his personality that emerges from the Vedic and post-Vedic literature. Thereafter the concept of Brahmā was further developed. In the Purāṇas, even the Vedas have been called as *Svayambhū* or self born.

वेदप्राणिहितो धर्मो ह्यधर्मस्तद्विपर्ययः।

वेदो नारायणः साक्षात् स्वयंभूरिति शुश्रुम॥

Brahmā is also believed to have emerged out of the lotus, that emerged from the navel of lord Viṣṇu. His lotus represents the eternal knowledge and life force.

Brahmā as Pitāmaha

The achieving of the title of the *Pitāmaha* by Brahmā is nothing short of a riddle. The stage at which the said epithet was adopted is difficult to specify, because, initially he was considered not only to be the creator of the universe, but also as the creator of the gods and the demons. It is repeatedly mentioned in the Brāhmaṇa literature as well as the Purāṇas that Brahmā was the creator of all the creatures. Both the gods and the demons always had the desire to further develop themselves and in these competitive efforts they had to come into conflict with one another. It has been repeatedly brought out in the Purāṇas, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* that the demons always held Brahmā in high esteem besides the gods. In the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* (1.18.32), it has been clearly stated that both the gods and the demons happened to be the sons of Brahmā, though he was more inclined towards the gods. Even the demons enjoyed his grace from time to time and he never hesitated to oblige them whenever an occasion arose. He bestowed a boon on Rāvaṇa, making him invincible in the battlefield—

स हि तेपे तपस्तीव्रं दीर्घकालमरिन्दम।

येन तुष्टोऽभवद् ब्रह्मा लोकभृत् लोकपूर्वजः॥

सन्तुष्टः प्रददी तस्मै राक्षसाय वरं प्रभुः।

नानाविधेभ्यो भूतेभ्यो भयं मान्यत्र मानुषात्॥

When Rāvaṇa became so invincible in the battlefield, and started troubling the gods, they went to Brahmā with a complaint—

भगवंस्तवप्रसादेन रावणो नाम राक्षसः।

सर्वान् नो बाधते वीर्यात् शासितुं तं न शक्नुमः॥

He also bestowed the boons on Kumbhakarna and Vibhiṣaṇa as per their desires. In the *Vana-parvan* (275.16-25) also, the event of Brahmā's granting boons to the three demon brothers

finds a mention. In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (Skanda-7, Ch. 3), it has been stated that the demon Hiranyakaśipu performed severe *tapas* to please Brahmā, standing on his toes and raising his hands upwards. The *tapas* performed by him was so hard, that the ants ate away his flesh, blood and skin and only his bones remained. Ultimately Brahmā revives his body with the sprinkling of the water over the demon's body and also granted him the desired boon.

There could be several instances in which Brahmā's adoration by the gods as well as the demons could be quoted. But the texts are not quite vocal on the issue as to why was he bestowed the title of Pitāmaha nor can we be sure of the period when it was actually bestowed on him. The appearing of the passage वभूव परमप्रीतो देवैरिव पितामहः॥ in the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* testifies that the title of Pitāmaha was used for Brahmā even in the epics. Interestingly, even the Upaniṣads used the same title for Brahmā as detailed below—

- | | |
|------------------------------|---|
| (i) मापराधास्तव च पितामहः॥ | — <i>Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad</i> , 6.2.8 |
| (ii) तस्मै स हो वाच पितामहः॥ | — <i>Kaivalya Upaniṣad</i> , 2 |
| (iii) चतुर्वक्त्रं पितामहम्॥ | — <i>Dhyāna Upaniṣad</i> , 12 |
| (iv) कुरु वृद्धः पितामहः॥ | — <i>Gītā</i> , 1.12 |

He was very often represented in the Indian plastic art from the earliest period and in due course time, his iconography also developed. A few specimens of his representation in art have been included in the work (Refer to Pls. 11-14).

7. Dhanada/Kubera/Dhanapati

Dhanapati, Dhanada or Kubera has been projected as the god of riches. He is invoked for the getting of a suitable match for girls, or for making the husband docile to wife, for the summoning of the husband, and to make the prospective husband to behave nicely with the girl—

आ क्रन्दय धनपते वरयामनसं कृणु।
सर्वं प्रदक्षिणं कृणु यो वरः प्रतिकाम्यः॥

—*Atharvaveda*, 2.26.6

In some hymns of the *Atharvaveda*, the word Dhanapati has been used as an adjective for the kings. अस्येन्द्र कुमारस्य क्रिमीन् धनपते जहि॥ (*Ibid.*, 5.23.2). अयमस्तु धनपतिर्थनानामयं विशां विश्वपतिरस्तु राजा॥ (*Ibid.*, 4.22.3). But the *Sāṃkhyāyana Śraut Sūtra* (2.14), the epithet of Kubera has been used. Being the son of Viśravā, Kubera is also known by the name of Vaiśrāvaṇa. In the *Atharvaveda* (2.36.6), the word Dhanapati has been made to denote Vaiśrāvaṇa (Kubera). Ācārya Sāyaṇa has also equated Dhanapati with Vaiśrāvaṇa or Kubera. Evidently the earliest form of the god was Dhanapati in the *Atharvaveda* and subsequently he was also known as Vaiśrāvaṇa. But during the *Gṛhya Sūtra* stage, his name as Kubera came to be known and gained considerable popularity in the later Vedic literature, when several important episodes were associated with him. In the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, Rāvaṇa, who happened to be his step brother drove him out of Laṅkā and established himself as the king of Laṅkā. Kubera perforce had to retreat to the Himālaya,

where he established his own kingdom. But Rāvaṇa did not allow him to live in peace there even. He attacked the kingdom of Kubera in Kailāśa and then defeating him carried away all his riches together with the Puṣpaka plane.

In the Uttara-kāṇḍa of the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* (13.21-23), Kubera has been described to possess a single yellow eye. There is a story connected with Kubera's having attained this position, according to which, Kubera once went to Himālaya in order to perform his *tapas*, where Pārvaṭī and Śiva were engaged in love-sport. Kubera enquired about the personality of Pārvaṭī. As soon as he looked at her opening his left eye, his eye was burnt out—

तत्र देवी महादृष्टा सह देव्यो महाप्रभुः।
 सव्यं चक्षुर्मया दैवात् तत्र देव्यां निपातितम्॥
 कान्वियं स्यादित शुभा न खल्वन्येन हेतुना।
 रूपं ह्यनुपमं कृत्वा रुद्रानी तत्र तिष्ठति॥
 देव्या दिव्याप्रभावेण दग्धं सव्यं ममेक्षणम्।
 रेणुध्वस्तमिव ज्योतिः पिङ्गलत्वमुपागतम्॥

—*Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, 7.13.22-25

Kubera has also been treated as the lord of riches and also the lord of the Yakṣas, who is usually depicted in Indian art having a protruding belly and a pot of coins in one of his hands. Sometimes he is depicted seated with a bag filled with coins. This is possibly the reason for calling Kubera as the treasurer of the gods. When Raghu, a king of the solar race needed crores of gold coins for making payment to Kautsa, the pupil of Varatantu, he thought of getting the same from Kubera.

In due course of time, his iconography was distinctly developed in the *Śilpaśāstras* and his images were enshrined in the temples.

8. Nārāyaṇa

The *Ṛṣi* of the ninetyeth Sūkta of the tenth Maṇḍala of the *Ṛgveda* happens to be Nārāyaṇa. This Sūkta is also known to be the Puruṣa Sūkta, in which the Parama Puruṣa has been adored in his *Virāṭa* form. Puruṣa Sūkta is usually found in all the Vedas. In the *Yajurveda*, the word Puruṣa has also been added to Nārāyaṇa. The scholars have interpreted the formation of Nārāyaṇa word—Nara+ayana = or the one who provides shelter to the human beings. In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (12.3.4.1), Prajāpati commands Puruṣa Nārāyaṇa, for the expansion of the universe. The same text further testifies (13.6.1.1), that Puruṣa Nārāyaṇa, performed the Puruṣamedha with the sole intention of the expansion of the universe. The tenth Prapathaha of the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*, came to be known as *Nārāyaṇa Upaniṣad*.

9. Dyau (द्यौ)

The word Dyau has been repeated in the *Ṛgveda* at least five hundred times which represents the sky. Sometimes, the term has been used for the day as well. Because of his being

the god of the sky, his name has been linked with earth. He has been adored in his individual capacity only eight times, otherwise, he has been associated with the earth as Dyāvā-Pṛthivī. He has also been treated as Vṛṣa and Lohita Vṛṣa (वृषा त्वा वृषणं वर्धतु द्यौर्वृषा वर्धतु द्यौर्वृषावृषभ्यां वइसे हरिभ्याम्। *Rgveda*, V.36.5). In the Vedic texts Dhyau has been treated to be the father while the earth has been known as the mother द्यौ इषितः वृथिविमातर धृक्। *Ibid.*, VI.51.5.

10. Virāṭa

The name of Virāṭa-Puruṣa, appears for the first time in the Puruṣa Sūkta of the *Rgveda* (8.10). It has been mentioned in the Vedas that initially the Virāṭa-Puruṣa was born. From the Virāṭa-Puruṣa, Yajña-Puruṣa was born. Thereafter the Virāṭa-Puruṣa pervaded the entire earth from all the sides (विराडग्रे समभवद् विराजो अधिपुरुषः। स जातो अव्यरिच्यत पश्चाद् भूमिमथो पुरः॥ *Atharvaveda*, 19.6.9). The Virāṭa-Puruṣa had thousands of arms, thousands of feet, thousands of eyes, who can pervade the earth with seven oceans and islands, established himself in the heart having the width of ten fingers (सहस्र बाहु पुरुषः सहस्राक्षः सहस्रपात्। स भूमिं विश्वतो वृत्वा अव्यतिष्ठद् दशाङ्गुलम्॥). Virāṭa has been elaborately discussed in the Puruṣa Sūkta of the *Rgveda*, the hymns of which have also been repeated in the *Atharvaveda*. The word *virāṭa* represents the masculine as well as the feminine genders (विराद् वाग्, विराद् पृथिवी, विराडन्तरिक्षं विराद् प्रजापतिः॥ *Ibid.*, 9.15.24). The word *virāṭa* has also been used as an adjective to the gods like Indra, Prajāpati, Parmeṣṭhi and others, still the basic concept of Virāṭa is associated with Virāṭa-Puruṣa alone.

11. Bṛhaspati

Bṛhaspati is one of the important Vedic gods and also is known by the name of Brāhmaṇaspati. Brahman stands for a Sūkta or a *stotra*, which is formed from the root *Bṛh*. The source which was responsible for the expansion of the gods is called *Bṛhm*. In several of the *Rgvedic* hymns it has been brought out that Indra's prowess increases with the hearing of the praise by him and feels invigorated for fighting with the demons—

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| (i) ब्रह्माणि इन्द्र तव यानि वर्धना॥ | (<i>Rgveda</i> , I.52.6). |
| (ii) उक्थै वावृश्रानः॥ | (<i>Ibid.</i> , II.11.2). |
| (iii) यस्येव ब्रह्म वर्धनम्॥ | (<i>Ibid.</i> , II.12.14). |
| (iv) यः स्तोमेभिः ववृधे पूर्व्येभिः॥ | (<i>Ibid.</i> , II.12.32). |
| (v) इन्द्र ब्रह्माणि तविषीम् अवर्धम्॥ | (<i>Ibid.</i> , V.31.10). |

In the Brāhmaṇa literature too for eulogising or offering prayer, the word मह्यम् or वर्धनम् has been frequently used. The word *Bṛh* also stands for the same like *Brah*. Brāhmaṇaspati and बृहस्पति therefore stand to mean the same. In *Nighaṇṭu*, Bṛhaspati is clubbed together with the gods of the earth, and many of the qualities of Agni are also found in Bṛhaspati. Like Agni he too is the son of Sahasāḥ (*Rgveda*, X.40.2). Like Agni, he too has three abodes (बृहस्पतिस्त्रिषधस्थः). Bṛhaspati is also known to be moving towards the heaven in his universal form (द्यामरक्षद् उत्तराणि

सदम्॥). He is also conceived to be destroying the demonic forces like fire (तेजिष्ठया सपनी रक्षसस्तप॥ *Ibid.*, II.23.14). The epithet of सदस्पति which is usually used for Agni was also used for him and he is adored in the household like Agni (IX.17.5).

Max Muller and Wilson, on the basis of several other passages, consider Bṛhaspati to be a form of Agni. MacDonnel too is of the opinion that Agni, in the form of a divine priest, has been known as Bṛhaspati (*Rgveda*, I.1.1; अग्निमीले पुरोहितम्). But the earlier association of Agni with Bṛhaspati is entirely on different ground. During the performing of the *yajñas* the god Agni has his own importance and as such he has been associated with many of the *yajña* priests. In the first ever hymn of the *Rgveda*, he has been addressed as the priest, *Ṛtvija* and *hotā* of the *yajña*. In the second hymn, he has been addressed as a *kavi*, while in many hymns (like VI.14.2), he has been addressed as a *Ṛṣi*. He had indeed been variously described in the Vedic texts.

Indeed the identical nature of Brhmanaspati and Agni is based on their association in the Vedic sacrifices. Slowly there had been a mutual exchange of each other's qualities. But Bṛhaspati has earned more qualities in the Vedic texts than the god Agni.

Bṛhaspati has been described to be the leader of the ancient *Ṛṣis* (तं प्रलास ऋषयो दीध्याना पुरो विप्रा दधिरे॥ IV.50.1). No *yajña* could be successful without Bṛhaspati (यस्माद् ऋते न सिध्यति यज्ञो॥ I.18.7). All the gods receive their share through him (II.23.2). He has been equated with Brahmā and the one who recites the glory.

There is no specific change in the form of Bṛhaspati in the *Atharvaveda*. He has also been defined as the divine poet (*Atharvaveda*, 4.1.5). He happens to be one of the seven *Ṛṣis*. Bṛhaspati had milked Brahman as well as *tapas* from Viraj, the cow, turning himself as a calf (तस्या सोमो राजा वत्स आसीत् तां बृहस्पति रागिरसो अधोक् ता ब्रह्म तपश्चा धोक्॥). In the *Yajurveda*, Bṛhaspati is said to be the controller of the *Sūktas* (*Vājasneyī Saṁhitā*, 34.58).

Bṛhaspati does not enjoy much of importance in the Brāhmaṇa literature, but a few stories relating to him are found here and there. In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (9.3.2.3), it is stated, that once all the gods assembled for performing of a *yajña*, but the demons from the south started creating obstructions in it. The god approached Indra saying, "you possess the greatest of the prowess among the gods, therefore you drive the demons away." Indra then informed the gods that he could do so, provided Bṛhaspati was associated with him (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 9.2.3.3).

During the time of the *Gṛhya Sūtras*, one finds a decline in the popularity of Bṛhaspati, where he was associated with knowledge and the wisdom. At the time of the *yajñopavīta* ceremony, he is invoked to infuse moral, spiritual and intelligent qualities in a Brahmacārī. In the *Parāskara Gṛhya Sūtra*, when the teacher accepts the boy as his pupil, he then addresses Bṛhaspati to receive his share, as a result of which he could be able to move on the right path in his life (*Sāṁkhāyana Gṛhya Sūtra*, 2.3.1). In the *Kāṇhika Gṛhyasūtra*, 4.1.9 and *Sāṁkhāyana Gṛhya Sūtra* (2.4.1), the teacher placing his hand over the heart of the pupil recites a *mantra* which tantamounts to consecrating Bṛhaspati in the boy's heart.

During the time of the Purāṇas, Bṛhaspati was totally reduced to the position of a Brāhmaṇa priest. During this period all the Vedic deities are treated to be a class of gods who are headed by Indra. Bṛhaspati then serves as a royal priest as all the kings on earth, had in the ancient times a priest attached to the court, who rendered advice to the king on all important matters. Thus, in the Purāṇas Bṛhaspati was believed to be the teacher of the gods, a courtier of Indra and the royal priest (*Mahābhārata*, Ādi-parvan, 76.6). He was the son of Aṅgirā and Sraddhā happened to be his mother (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, 4.1.35).

In the Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa of the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, he is described to be a good speaker and proficient in discussion. The *Brahma Purāṇa* projects him as a great politician holding the view that one should overcome his enemy by any means. It is he who advised the gods to resort to the churning of the ocean in association with the demons. He further advised them that at the emergence of the nectar, they should consume the whole of it and even a drop of it should not go to the demons—

बृहस्पतिस्तथोत्थाह पुनराह सुरानिदम्।
न जानन्ति यथा पापाः पिवध्वं च तथामृतम्॥
अयमेवोचितो मन्त्रो यच्छत्रूणां पराभवः।
द्वेष्या सर्वात्मना द्वेष्या इति नीतिविदो विदुः॥

—*Brahma Purāṇa*, 106.16-17

In the *Pratimā Nāṭaka* (5.9), Bhāṣa has mentioned about *Arthaśāstra* created by Bṛhaspati (बाहस्पत्यम् अर्थशास्त्रम्॥). This book is stated to have been studied by Rāvaṇa. In the *Mahābhārata*, the views of Bṛhaspati on politics have occasionally been mentioned. The *Brahma Purāṇa* (71.28), however, describes him to be the one possessing great wisdom. There is an other story in this *Purāṇa*, according to which feeding the divine bitch Saramā, Paṇi, stole away the divine cows. Saramā goes and reports the matter to Indra about the stealing of the cows by Paṇi. But Bṛhaspati realises the truth about the same and informs the gods thus—

इयं विकृति रूपास्ते अस्या पापं न लक्षये।
अस्या मतेन ता गावो नीता नान्येन हेतुना॥
पापेयं सुकृती वेति लक्ष्यते देह चीष्टितैः॥

—*Brahma Purāṇa*, 131.9

Saying this Saramā was killed, as a result of which she vomited the entire milk consumed by her (131.10). Besides the above, there are several other stories available about him in the Purāṇic texts.

12. The Moon

The godhood of the Moon or Candramā is testified in the *R̥gveda*, *Yajurveda* as well as the *Atharvaveda*. The moon comes to be the foremost of the gods of space. Candramā is considered to have been born out of the mind in the *Yajurveda* (31.12) चन्द्रमा मनसो जातः॥. It is further

testified that his existence is based on the sun. On the moonless day (*Amāvasyā*), the moon is stated to enter the sun disc (चन्द्रमा वा अमावस्यायामादित्यमनु प्रविशति॥ *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, 8.28). The *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa* (16.5) as well as the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (7.11) claim that Soma and Candra have no separate entities and they are to be treated as one and the same—

(i) सोमो वै चन्द्रमा॥ (16.5)

(ii) एतद्वै देव सोमं यच्चन्द्रमा॥ (7.11)

The moon has been declared to be the lord of the night. Both the dark and the bright fortnights emanate from his movement, as a result of which the gods receive their respective share of the sacrifice. The Moon has also been described to be the creator of months and seasons. He happens to be the best of the constellations besides being their glory (चन्द्रमा अस्य आदित्ये श्रितः नक्षत्राणां प्रतिष्ठा॥ (*Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, 3.11.1.12). In the *Atharvaveda*, both the Sun and the Moon have been equated with the children, who while in playful mood sometimes go forward and backwards. While engaged in such a play, the sun looks at the *Bhuvanas* and the moon creates the seasons.

पूर्वापरं चरतो माययैतौ शिशु क्रीडन्तौ परि यातोऽर्णवम्।
विश्वान्यो भुवना विचष्ट ऋतूरन्यो विदधजायसे नवः॥

—*Atharvaveda*, 7.86.1

The Moon is also conceived to provide peace, rest and long life—

भागं देवेभ्यो विदधास्यायन्नचन्द्रमस्तिरसे दीर्घायु॥ —*Ibid.*, 7.86.2

In the Vedic literature, the Moon has been considered to be a *loka*. Accordingly of all the creations of Virāṭa-Puruṣa, those of the Sun and the Moon are considered to be most important. The *Rgveda* (X.190.3), highlights the above aspect as follows—

सूर्यचन्द्रमसौ धाता यथा पूर्वमकल्पयत्।
दिवं च पृथिवीं चान्तरिक्षमथो स्वः॥

The relation between the Moon and the constellations has been described in the *Taittirīya Saṁhitā* as follows—

यथा सूर्यो दिवा चन्द्रमसे समनमन्नक्षत्रेभ्यो
समनद् यथा चन्द्रमा नक्षत्रे वरुणाय समनमत्

According to the Vedic belief, the fire is said to be established on earth, the wind pervades the sky, Sūrya in the space and Moon in the constellations. The modern science thinks the constellations to have been placed at a considerable distance from the Moon. But the Moon can in no way be separated from the constellations, they are located at a considerable distance from each other.

Sāyaṇa, while commenting on the *R̥gveda* has stated that the Moon derives his light from the sun. This theory is accepted by the modern science as well. The theory of the moon deriving the light from the sun was brought out in the *R̥gveda*, and Sāyaṇa while commenting on the issue states that—

चन्द्रबिम्बे सूर्य किरणाः प्रतिफलन्ति॥

The circumference of the moon is stated to be 2159 miles and the moon is therefore far smaller in size than the sun. The moon is considered to be a satellite of the earth, which has the direct and the closest connection with the earth. The distance between the moon and the earth happens to be 2,52,710 miles. The composers of the Brāhmaṇa literature had brought out long back that the spots which appear in the disc of the moon was the heart of Pṛthivī—

यच्चन्द्रमसि कृष्णं पृथिव्यां हृदयं श्रितम्।

The black spots in the moon thus point out to the close links of the moon with earth. The *R̥gveda* and the *Atharvaveda* describe the moon as the child of earth—*शिशुर्महीनाम्*॥ In the *Upaniṣads*, the moon has been described as the one who makes the *oṣadhis* (medicinal plants) to grow. In the *Praśnopaniṣad*, it has been stated that Sūrya is the life and the moon is the food.

But in the literature of the subsequent period, especially the Purāṇas, the moon was conceived in human form and several stories in the Purāṇic literature speak about the same.

13. Gaṇapati

Gaṇapati happens to be one of the Vedic gods who travelled from the Vedic times reaching the modern times not only on Indian soil but also travelled abroad. He is adored in the Vedic literature as the leader of the Gaṇas, but some of the Vedic texts point to his early adoration as the remover of the obstructions, and for several other reasons—

नि षु सीद गणपते गणेषु त्वामाहुर्विप्रतमं कवीनाम्।
न ऋते त्वत् क्रियते किं चनारे महामर्कमघवञ्चित्रमर्च॥

—*R̥gveda*, X.112.9

(O Gaṇapati, you are the lord of Vasus, Ādityas, Rudras and other gods, be established among your devotees or *gaṇas*. You happen to be the best among the *R̥ṣis* or the poets. You help in completion of the good deeds. No welfare work can start whether in the vicinity or far off places without adoring you. You are the lord of riches and treasurers. You bestow a boon on me for the completion of *yajña*.)

The *Śukla Yajurveda* in one of its hymn (23.19), describes Gaṇapati as the commander of the gods, bestower of riches, progeny, spouses and other things of one's liking. He is said to be the lord of all the riches. He is also invoked for the generation of *Śakti* (force) and make the people capable of possessing the same—

नमो गणेभ्यो गणपतिभ्यश्च वो नमो नमो ब्रातेभ्यो ब्रातपतिभ्यश्च वो नमो॥
 नमो गृत्सेभ्यो गृत्सपतिभ्यश्च वो नमो नमो विरूपेभ्यो विश्वरूपेभ्यश्च वो नमः॥

Gaṇapati is the lord of all the three *guṇas* (*Sattva, rajas, tamas*). He is known by innumerable names which are spelt out in various texts. The Vedic texts are quite silent about the parentage of Gaṇapati, but in the Purāṇic literature, he has been described to be the son of Śiva and Pārvatī. The Purāṇic texts have innumerable stories about his birth and other details, which have been brought out in the author's work entitled "*The Cult of Vināyaka*"—1992, which could be referred to for further details.

4

The Gods of Water

1. Samudra

Samudra is the word frequently used in the *Rgveda* and the later Vedic literature. It is quite important that the Vedic people were well aware of the ocean, though it is contested by some Western scholars including Saint Martin, Max Muller and Lessen besides Zimmer who is inclined to restrict their knowledge of the sea as far as possible, admits in a passage of the *Rgveda* (VII.95.2) and of later course. He points out that the ebb and the flow of the sea are not known, that the mouths of the Indus are never mentioned and the fish is not known as a diet in the *Rgveda*, and in many places Samudra is metaphorically used of the two oceans, the lower and the upper oceans etc. In other passages he thinks that Samudra denotes the river Indus when it receives all its Punjab tributaries (*Rgveda*, I.71.7). It is possible that this is to circumscribe too narrowly the Vedic knowledge of the ocean, which was almost inevitable to the people who knew the Indus. There are references to the treasures of the ocean (*Ibid.*, I.47.6), VII.6.7; IX.97.44) perhaps the pearls and the gains of the trade (*Ibid.*, I.48.3; I.56.2; IV.55.6) and the story of Budhnya seems to point to marine navigation.

In the texts Samudra invariably means the sea, which is also mentioned in the following text—

- (i) *Taittirīya Samhitā* (2.4.8.2), (7.5.1.2)
- (ii) *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (5.16.7)—It is described as unfailing and it encircles the earth (*Ibid.*, 8.25.1).
- (iii) *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (10.6.4.1)—The eastern and western oceans though metaphorical probably indicate an acquaintance with both the seas, the Indian ocean and the Arabian sea.
- (iv) *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (2.4.1; 3.19.2; 4.6.3; 6.10.1).
- (v) *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (1.1.2; 2.4.11; 3.3.2).
- (vi) *Śvetāśvatārā Upaniṣad* (4.4).
- (vii) *Mundūka Upaniṣad* (1.9).
- (viii) *Mahānārāyaṇīya Upaniṣad* (1.3; 5.5; 5.6; 6.1, 9.12).
- (ix) *Praśna Upaniṣad* (6.5)
- (x) *Sarvopaniṣad* (4)
- (xi) *Gītupaniṣad* (2.70; 11.28).

The worship of the ocean is still in vogue in the present day Hinduism which indeed is based on the ancient religious traditions. The ocean is known as the *Ratnagarbhā* (filled with jewels), is revered by the people on the dark day of the moon or the moonless day, when a sea bath is considered to be of considerable merit when the waters of 999 rivers are supposed to be

brought into the ocean by the spring tides. Bathing is also efficacious during the whole of the intercalary month and in parts of the western India on the bright second of every month people light a fire on the shore, throw butter into it and on the day when the fleet puts to sea fishermen pour milk, sugar, and liquor into the water, offering flowers and cocoanuts into the sea. In western India, Cocanut Day is held at the full moon of the month of Śrāvaṇa (July-August) in the height of annual monsoon, when flowers and cocoanuts are thrown into the oceanic water to secure the favour of the sea, or a thanks offering, because by this time, the most serious storms are supposed to have ceased. The Vada fishermen on the east coast worship the seagoddess Orusandramma who roams over the sea at night with a male deity, her brother Rāmasondi and is worshipped with special rites. On the west, Koli fisherwomen wear glass bangles only on the left wrist, because on their wedding day, the right arm bangles are thrown into the sea to win its favour. In the Purāṇas there is a belief, which still survives that the seven continents of the world are surrounded by seven oceans, which include—

- (i) Lavaṇa or Salt water ocean
- (ii) Ikṣu or Sugarcane juice
- (iii) Surā, wine
- (iv) Ghṛta (butter oil or clarified butter)
- (v) Dadhi (curd)
- (vi) Dugdha (milk)
- (vii) Jala (fresh water)

2. Sapta Sindhu

In the Vedic literature, the Sapta Sindhu (seven oceans) have been adored for the sake of protection and as such they have also been included in the category of the gods (अपानपात् सिन्धवः सप्त पाता रूत द्यौः।। *Atharvaveda*, 6.3.1). In the dictionaries, Sapta Sindhu have been equated with seven rivers. Max Muller has described the Sarasvatī, Sindhu and the five rivers of Punjab as Sapta Sindhu. In the Purāṇic dictionary (p. 511), the seven rivers have been believed to be of the following three categories—

- (i) Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Sarasvatī, Sutudri (सतलज), Paruṣṇi, Marudvṛddhā and Ārjikuja (Vyāsa or Vipāśā) as defined in the Vedic texts.
- (ii) Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Plakṣga, Rathastha, Sarayū, Gomatī and Gaṇḍaka or Vasvakasara, Nalinī, Pāvanī, Gaṅgā, Sītā, Sindhu and Jambhu as noted in the *Mahābhārata*.
- (iii) Nalinī, Hradinī, Pāvanī, Cakṣu, Sindhu, Sītā and Bhāgīrathī as mentioned in the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

The seven rivers have been described as Sapta Sindhu in the following hymn of the *Rgveda*—सप्त सिन्धवः। (*Rgveda*, I.32.12). In the *Atharvaveda* (4.3.2), the seven oceans of the world have been specifically mentioned. All these rivers or the oceans have been adored as gods in the Vedic literature.

3. Āpodevatā

Four complete Sūktas are devoted to this god in the *Ṛgveda*. This terminology has been mainly used for flowing water, clouds, rivers, streams and ocean. The god is invoked for the removal of the misfortune (इदमापः प्र वहत यत्किं च दुरितं मयि। *Ṛgveda*, I.13.22). He is also invoked in the form of Bhiṣaj (यूयं हिष्टा भिषजो मातृत्मा। *Ibid.*, VI.50.7). Apa is also conceived to have the purifying effect (आपो वै पवित्रम्।। *Kaṭha Samhitā*, 8.8). Apa has also been conceived as the life (आपो वै प्राणाः। *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 3.8.2.4). He has also been conceived as the very base of the universe (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 4.5.2.14).

4. The Rivers

The following rivers are found mentioned in the *Ṛgveda*, though of course, both the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā are considered to be the sacred of all—

- | | | |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1. Anitabhā | 2. Ārjikiyā | 3. Ūrnāvatī |
| 4. Krumu | 5. Gaṅgā | 6. Gomatī |
| 7. Trṣṭārṇā | 8. Paruśnī | 9. Marudvṛdhā |
| 10. Mehatnu | 11. Yamunā | 12. Vavyāvatī |
| 13. Rasā | 14. Revā | 15. Vāranāvatī |
| 16. Vitastā | 17. Vipās | 18. Vibālī |
| 19. Śiphā | 20. Sutudrī | 21. Śvetyā |
| 22. Sadānīrā | 23. Sarayū | 24. Sarasvatī |
| 25. Sindhu | 26. Silamāvatī | 27. Sudāmau |
| 28. Suvastru | 29. Suśomā | 30. Susartu |
| 31. Hariyūpiyā | | |

Though the Vedic seers considered the rivers to be sacred, but some of them like the Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Sarasvatī, Sindhu and others were considered to be of special importance.

Sarasvatī

This is also the name of a river frequently mentioned in the Vedic and post-Vedic literature. In many passages of the later texts, the river meant is the modern Sarasvatī which loses itself in the sands of Patiala. Even Roth admits that this river is intended in some passages of the *Ṛgveda*. With the Dṛśadvatī, it formed the western boundary of Brahmavarta. It indeed represents the sacred river of the early Vedic India. The Sūtras mention sacrifices held on its banks as of great importance and sanctity. In many other passages of the *Ṛgveda* (I.89.3; I.164.19; II.41.16 etc.) and even later Roth held that another river, the Sindhu (Indus) was really meant; only thus could it be explained why the Sarasvatī is called the foremost of the rivers, is said to go to the ocean and is referred to as a large river, on the banks of which many kings and indeed, the five tribes were located (*Ṛgveda*, VI.61.12).

Some of the scholars, however, maintain the identity of the Vedic Sarasvatī with later Sarasvatī. In the Vedic times, the Sarasvatī was as large a stream as the Sutlej and that it actually reached the ocean either after union with the Indus or not, being the iron citadel, as the last boundary on the west, a frontier of the Punjab against the rest of India. There is no conclusive evidence of there having been any great change in the size or the course of Sarasvatī, though it would be impossible to deny that the river may easily have diminished in size. But there are strong reasons to accept the identification of the later and the earlier Sarasvatī throughout. The insistence on the divine character of the river is seen in the very hymn (*Rgveda*, II.41.16) which refers to it as the support of the five tribes and corresponds well with its later sacredness. Moreover, that hymn alludes to the Paravatas, a people shown by the later evidence of the *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* to have been in the east, a very long way from their original home, if Sarasvatī means the Indus. Again the Purus, who were settled on the Sarasvatī (*Rgveda*, VIII.24.27) could with great difficulty be located in the far west. Moreover, the five tribes might easily be held to be on the Sarasvatī, when they were, as they seem to have been, the western neighbours of Bharatas in Kurukṣetra and the Sarasvatī could easily be regarded as the boundary of the Punjab in this sense. The mention of seven rivers (*Sapta Sindhu*) in one passage clearly points to the five rivers with the Indus and Kubha (the Kabul river) accept the five rivers including Indus and Sarasvatī. Nor is it difficult to see why the river is said to flow to the sea; either the Vedic seers had never followed the course of the river to its end, or the river did penetrate actually the desert either completely or for a long distance and only in the Brāhmaṇa period was its disappearance in the desert found out. The *Vājasneyī Saṁhitā* (34.11), however, testifies that the five rivers go to the Sarasvatī, but this passage seems not only to be a later addition, but also does not specify that the five rivers meant were the Punjab rivers. Besides the above passage is not supported by other Saṁhitās nor could it be regarded as an early production. In case it be a later addition, it could possibly refer to the later Sarasvatī.

Yamunā

This is the river which has been mentioned thrice in the *Rgveda* (V.52.17; VII.18.19; X.75.5) and runs parallel to the Gaṅgā. According to the *Rgveda* (VII.18.19), Tṛtsus and Sudās won a great victory against their enemies on the Yamunā. In the *Atharvaveda* (4.9.10) the Salve (Āñjana) of the Yamunā is mentioned along with that of Triakud (*Traikakudo*) as of value. In the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (8.23) and the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (13.4.4.11), the Bharatas are famed as victorious on the Yamunā. Other Brāhmaṇas also mention the river.

Sindhu

In the *Rgveda* (I.97.8; I.125.5 etc.) and the *Atharvaveda* (3.13.1; 4.24.2 etc.) the term stands for a stream, but it has the more exact sense of the stream *par excellence*—the Indus. The name is rarely mentioned after the Saṁhitās. The horses from Indus were quite famous. (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 6.2.15).

Gaṅgā

The river Gaṅgā has been mentioned in the *Ṛgveda* only once (X.75.5), in the *Nadī-stuti* or the Praise of Rivers. But it is also referred to in the derivative form *gandyaḥ* as an epithet of Urukākṣa (*Ṛgveda*, VI.45.31). The name of this river does not occur in the other *Samhitās*, but appears in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (13.5.4.11) where the victories of Bharata Dauḥsanti on both Gaṅgā and Yamunā are referred to and in the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* (2.20), special honour is assigned to those who dwell between the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā rivers. This is no doubt the region in which the Vedic texts originated.

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5 Minor Gods

(i) Uśanā

This god has also been known as the *Kāvya Uśanā*. He is known as *Kāvya* too, being the son of a poet. In the poetry of intelligence has been equated with *Uśanā*. Even Indra feels happy in the company of *Uśanā*—

मन्दिष्ट युदशने काव्ये सचाँ इन्द्रो वडकूवड्कूतराधि शवः।

—*Rgveda*, I.51.11

Indra has been invoked for the promotion of *Uśanā*, the son of the poet and for his enjoyment with him—

त्वं वृध इन्द्र पूव्यो भूर्वरिवस्यनुशने काव्याव्य। —*Rgveda*, VI.20.11

(O Indra, you do welfare of *Uśanā*, who is desirous of having an abode).

In *Rgveda* (I.51.11), Indra has been stated to be closely associated with *Uśanā*. *Uśanā* is also stated to have been associated with Indra in his battle against *Suśeṇa*. *Uśanā* had also made the *Vajra* for use of Indra in his battle with *Vṛtra* and as such *Uśanā* is considered to be quite an intelligent, valorous and a god well versed in the construction works—

यं ते काव्य उशना मन्दिनं दाद् वृत्रहणं पार्यं ततक्ष वज्रम्॥

—*Rgveda*, I.121.12

(ii) Vasus

There are some Vedic gods who are adored in groups which include, *Ādityas*, *Rudras*, *Viśvadevas*, *Maruts* and *Vasus*. Generally the number of *Vasus* is taken to be eight (अष्टौ देवा वसवः सोम्यासः॥ *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*, 3.1.2.6). But sometimes their number swells to three hundred and thirty-three, as is spelt out in the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* (5.2.2.6)—(तेन त्रीणि च शतान्य सृजन्त त्रयस्त्रिंशत् च॥). The word *Vasu* means the riches and this could be the reason for taking *Vasu* to be the bestower of the riches. Yask, the composer of *Nirukta* has defined *Vasu* thus—वसुना अन्नसाधनेव गवादी वनेव॥ (5.19). The *Vasus* also destroy the enemies of the devotees (*Atharvaveda*, 3.1.2). The *Vasus* are mainly associated with *Ādityas* and *Rudras* (एते वै त्रया देवा यद् वसवो रुद्रा आदित्या॥ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 1.3.4.12). In the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* (6.2.2.1), he is described to be the associate of *Agni*, *Indra*, *Soma*, *Rudra*, *Āditya*, *Varuṇa*, *Viśvedeva*, *Bṛhaspati* and other gods. He is also said to protect the people from outer attacks.

(iii) Dusvapna-nāsana

In the *Rgveda* (I.120.12), this god enjoys an insignificant position. All the *Rcās* of *Sūktā* 120 are dedicated to *Aśvinikumāras*, but the last one (I.120.12) has been exclusively dedicated to this god. According to the *Bṛhaddevatā*, there is no separate god for *Dusvapna-nāsana*.

(iv) Devagaṇa

In one of the *ṛcā* of the *Ṛgveda*, all the children, the young and the old have been taken to be gods and have been adored individually using the term देवाः (or Devagaṇa) for them. They have been termed as Viśvedeva in the *Bṛhaddevatā* (3.99) (जराबोधेति विज्ञेया वैश्वदेव्युत्तमा नमः।). Sāyaṇa too has taken the term to be the group of gods or the gods of the universe (त्रयोदश्या नमो महद्भयः इत्यस्या त्रिष्टुप छन्दः विश्वेदेवा देवता॥ *Ṛgveda*, I.27, Sāyaṇa's Commentary).

(v) Mādhava

This god is not quite popular in the Vedic deities. He has been invoked in a single *ṛcā* of the *Ṛgveda* (II.26.2) for the drinking of Soma with Maruts. Since his name does not appear in his individual capacity, it could be assumed that this could be an adjective for Maruts.

(vi) Madhu

Madhu or honey too has been treated to be a god in the *Ṛgveda* (II.36.1), wherein Indra is said to have invited him for the drinking of Soma. But in this passage his name does not appear in an individual capacity. This could, therefore, be an adjective of Indra as well.

(vii) Apamnapata

In the *Ṛgveda* (2.35), the god is conceived to be the son of the Water and Agni, who remains concealed in the clouds. His complexion has therefore been defined to be golden (हिरण्य रूपः स हिरण्यसंदृग्पातपात्मेदु हिरण्य वर्णः *Ṛgveda*, II.35.10). He is born of the waters and grows and shines in the universe (सो अपां नपादूर्जा यन्पस्व अन्तर्बसुदेवाय विथते विभाति। *Ibid*, II.35.7). Apamnapata has also been equated with Sūrya and Savitā.

(viii) Apatṛṇa Sūrya

A Sūkta in the *Ṛgveda* (I.191) has been dedicated to this god. *Apa*, *Tṛṇa* and Sūrya are considered to be three separate gods. The word *Apa* is used for water, *tṛṇa* for vegetation and Sūrya for the sun. Sāyaṇa in his commentary brings out the fact, that the sage Agastya once developed a doubt about being poison in something. In order to remove the effect of the poison, he applied the hymns of Apatṛṇa-Sūrya for the purpose.

कङ्कतः षोलशोपनिषदानुष्टुभमपृणसौर्य
विष शंकावानगस्त्यः प्राब्रवीदुशम्याद्याश्च
तिस्रो महा पङ्क्तयो महावृहती च इति॥

—*Ṛgveda*, I.191, Sāyaṇa's Commentary

The sage Saunaka observed that when bitten by a snake, insect, locust, scorpion, etc., the recitation of the above Sūkta prevents the poison from spreading further (अत्र शौनकः—कंकतो नेति सूक्तं तु विषार्तः प्रयतो जपेत्। विषं न क्रमते चास्य सर्पाद् दृष्टिविषादपि॥ *Ibid*, I.191, Sāyaṇa's Comm.).

(ix) Ahirbudhnya

The god has been adored in the *Rgveda* (VII.34.17). Possibly the demon Ahi has been invoked in the said passage of the *Rgveda* and in the next passage (VII.34.16), he has been mentioned as Abja-Ahi. The text of *Bṛhaddevatā* (5.166) supports the same idea (योऽहिः बुध्यो बुध्ने हिणोऽन्तरिक्षेऽभिजायते।). Since he was born in the space, therefore, Ahirbudhnya and the space water is created like the clouds. Ahi has been termed as Abja-Ahi. The fire (lightning) which resides in the clouds has been termed as Ahirbudhnya (अहिरबुध्यो भवनस्य रक्षिता).

(x) Sāvarṇi

The godhood of Sāvarṇi emerges in the *Rgveda* (X.62.8-11). In these passages the charity prayers of Sāvarṇi have been highlighted. Sāvarṇi or Sāvarṇya is the name of Manu. According to the Purāṇic dictionary Sanjñā, the wife of Sūrya, being unable to bear the heat of the sun, left him leaving behind a lady of his own form, to her parents' home. Sāvarṇi, the eighth Manu was born of her. *Bṛhaddevatā* has testified the godhood of Sāvarṇi thus—(स्तौति प्र नूनमित्याद्याः सावर्ण्यस्य मनोस्तुतिः।।).

(xi) Vena

The godhood of Vena is available in the *Rgveda* (X.1.23), besides the other Vedic literature. He has been equated with Āditya, Indra and Ātmān—आदित्यो वेनो यद्वै प्रजिजनिषमाणोऽवेन तस्याद्वेनः। (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 7.4.1.14), इन्द्र उवै वैनः।। (*Kauśītaki Brāhmaṇa*, 8.4), आत्मा वैः वेणः।। (*Ibid.*, 8.5). Vena has been considered to be a god of medium importance. *Nirukta* had described Vena as the illumining cloud (ज्योतिर्द्येतिमानो मेघः।।). Besides *Bṛhaddevatā* (2.52), Sāyaṇa too have accepted Vena's godhood.

(xii) Viśvavasu Deva Gandharva

He happens to be a lower type of god, because, in the Vedic literature (*Rgveda*, X.139.4-6), like Apsarās, Ṛbhus, the protective gods were also accorded sanctity. In the *Yajurveda*, their number has been mentioned as twenty-seven, while in the *Atharvaveda*, the number swells to 6,333. (गन्धर्वाणमन्यायन्त्रयस्त्रिंशत त्रिंशता षट्सहस्रा सर्वान्स पिपर्तिः।। *Atharvaveda*, 11.5.2). Sometimes the adjective of Viśvavasu is found added to this name (विश्ववसु सोम गन्धर्वमापो व्यायन्। *Rgveda*, X.139.4).

(xiii) Vṛṣākapi

In the Vedic literature, there is a mention of Vṛṣākapi who was closely associated with Indra and his spouse Indrāṇī—

वि हि सोतोह सुक्षत नेन्द्रं देवं मंसत।

यन्नामदद्वृषाकपिरयः पुष्टेषु मत्सखा विश्वमादिन्द्र उत्तरः।

—*Rgveda*, X.86.1

The aforesaid passage highlights a conversation between Indra and his spouse Indrāṇī, which took place in the presence of Vṛṣākapi. In this passage, Vṛṣākapi has been projected as the friend of Indra, but at the same time, he annoys his spouse Indrāṇī and he is even thrashed. There is a school of thought, which has tried to equate Vṛṣākapi with Hanumān, is quite a difficult question, but the facts placed below throw some interesting light on the subject. Besides the epithet of *Kapindra*, which stands for Indra among the monkeys is also indicative of some association of the apes with Indra. In the first place it would be desirable to understand the correct meaning of Vṛṣākapi; which evidently is the combination of the term वृषा+कपि. The term वृषा (Vṛṣā) has been used in the Vedic literature, which denotes an extremely powerful one having immense strength, and has been used for Indra as would be evident from the following instances—

(i) वृषायमिन्द्र ते रथ। —*Rgveda*, VIII.13.31

(O Indra, your chariot is quite strong and powerful.)

(ii) वृषा ग्रावा वृषा मदो वृषा सोमो अयं सुतः।
वृषा यज्ञो यमिन्वसि वृषा हवः॥ —*Ibid.*, VIII.13.32

(For Indra, the grinding appliance of Soma, the pleasure derived from Soma, *yajña* and the *stuti* recited thereafter, all provide immense strength.)

(iii) वृषा त्वा वृषणं हुवे वज्रिञ्चित्रामिरुतिभिः।
वावन्य हि प्रतिष्ठति वृषा हवः॥ —*Ibid.*, VIII.13.33

(O Indra, the holder of *vajra*, I am full of strength, and I invite you being fully strong. Your praise fulfils all the desires.)

(iv) वृषणश्वेन मरुतो वृषप्सुना वृषनाभिना॥ —*Ibid.*, VIII.20.10

(Riding over a chariot drawn by powerful horses, the strong people are invited to participate in the *yajña*.)

The above illustrations make it abundantly clear that the epithet of वृषा has been used in the *Rgveda* for the display of immense power and strength and Kapi stands for a monkey or an ape. A.A. MacDonell observes on the episode of Vṛṣākapi in the *Rgveda* as follows—(*Vedic Mythology*, Re, Delhi, 1963)—

“A myth which seems to have no general significance but to be simply the invention of a later poet of *Rgveda* is that of Indra and Vṛṣākapi, the details of which are given obscurely in the *Rgveda* (10.86). This hymn describes about a dispute between Indra and his wife Indrāṇī, about monkey Vṛṣākapi who is the favourite of the former and has damaged the property of the latter. Vṛṣākapi is soundly thrashed and escapes, but afterwards returns when a reconciliation takes place. V. Bradle considers the story a satire in which under the names of Indra and Indrāṇī, a certain prince and his wife are intended.”

Evidently by the time of *Ṛgveda* some closeness between the monkeys and the humans had started which could also mean to make use of monkeys in one way or the other. The fact is corroborated by the *Taittirīya Saṁhitā* (4.2.10.1), the word मधु has been used which means a forest ape or a *langur*—

इमं मा हिंसी द्विपादं पशुनां सहस्राश्वमेध आ चीयमान।
मधुमारण्यमनुते दिशामि तेन चिन्नानस्तनुनु वोनिवीद॥

The same word *Madhu* is available in the *Vājasneyī Saṁhitā* (24.3; 8.47), in the context of *aśvamedha* sacrifice. Besides the word मर्कट has also been used in the *Vājasneyī Saṁhitā* (24.30) and *Taittirīya Saṁhitā* (5.5.11.1). The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* provides some evidence that by that time some sort of veneration of the monkeys or apes had started, besides the introduction of an exclusive cult of monkey worshippers as would be evident from the following passage of the same text—

तस्य यथा कप्यासं पुण्डरीकमेव भक्षिणी तस्योरिति नाम स एव।
सर्वेभ्यः पाप्मन्य उदित उदेति हवै सर्वेभ्यः पाप्मन्यो य एवं वेद॥

In the *Kaṭhaka Saṁhitā* (30.2.4), the term Luśākapi has been used in place of Vṛṣākapi—

हो वाच लुशाकपिः खार्गलैः कयग्रहानग्रहीष्टे तीत्यमिति हास्या उच्चस।

As for the equation of Vṛṣākapi with Hanumān of the epics it may be stated that divergent views are available on the subject—

- (i) F.E. Pargiter has equated Vṛṣākapi with Hanumān (*RAS*, 1911, p. 803 and 1913, p. 396).
- (ii) Suniti Kumar Chatterjee (*Vedic Age*, p. 164), supports the views of Pargiter, saying that Pargiter on the basis of his research on Hanumant arrives at a conclusion that some monkey-god was held in veneration by the non-Aryans. When Aryans came to know of it, they termed the deity as Vṛṣākapi. The deity possessed a composite half human and half monkey form and was called Anamanti in Dravida language. The same god has been inducted in the tenth Maṇḍala of the *Ṛgveda*. Subsequently Anamanti came to be known as Hanumanta.
- (iii) Goldener (*Vedic Studies*, Part-II, p. 22) feels that the entire account of Vṛṣākapi has been lost and only a small part of the same is available. But Pargitar on the basis of the text of the *Brahma Purāṇa*, has provided the details of the episode of Vṛṣākapi rather elaborately which are somewhat wanting in the *Ṛgveda*. According to the *Brahma Purāṇa* (Chapter-129), Indra once went to Śiva with a complaint that he was humiliated and tortured by Mahāśani, who carried him forcibly to *Pātāla*. He, therefore, wanted to acquire some strength by which to overpower the demon (*Ibid.*, 129.84).

बलवान्मे रिपुश्चाऽऽसीदृश्नैश्च शनिर्मया।
तेन बद्धस्तलं नीतः परिभूतस्त्वनेकधा॥

Śiva then told Indra, that he would not be able to face his enemy alone. Therefore, he should pray to Hari, Viṣṇu, Nārāyaṇa, Janārdana and other deities for the purpose. Then only he could have his desire fulfilled from Śiva—

सः शिव शक्रमाहेदं न मयैकेन ते रिपु।
वधमाप्नोति तस्मात्त्वं विष्णु मप्यव्ययं हरिम्॥
आराधयस्व पौलोम्या सह देवं जनार्दनम्।
लोकत्रैक शरणं नारायणमनन्यधी॥

—*Brahma Purāṇa* (129.87-88)

Indra then having a sacred bath at the confluence of Phena and Gaṅgā rivers, started adoring Viṣṇu, who was ultimately pleased and desired Indra to ask for a boon. Indra then begged for a device for the killing of his enemy which was granted by Viṣṇu. At once, there appeared from the waters of the Gaṅgā, with the blessings of Gaṅgā, Śiva and Viṣṇu, a figure, composite in form, retaining the features of Śiva and Viṣṇu, holding a *cakra* and *śula* in his hands. Immediately thereafter he went to *Pātāla* and killed the enemy of Indra thereafter.

There is also a possibility that the cult of Vṛṣākapi was in some form in vogue in ancient India which could be the reason for his equation with Indra, Rudra, Varāha and Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata* and other texts. His profile in the *Mahābhārata* is described as under—

वृषो हि भगवान् धर्मः ख्यातो लोकेषु भारत।
नैघण्टुकपदाख्याने विद्धि मां वृषमुत्तमम्॥
कपिर्वराहः श्रेष्ठश्च धर्मस्य वृष मुच्यते।
तस्माद् वृषाकपि प्राह कश्यपो मा प्रजापति॥

—*Śānti-parvan*, 342.88-89

However, Pargiter has emphatically stressed on the point that Vṛṣākapi of the Vedic time took the form of Hanumān in the subsequent literature, wherein he was also adored as Mahākapi, and his views are more or less based on the provisions of the *Brahma Purāṇa*.

(xiv) Dhanvantri

The third Sūkta of the third *khaṇḍa* of the *Atharvaveda* is dedicated to Dhanvantri, who is described to be the physician of the gods. It is also called the *Bhaisajya Sūkta* because it contains details about the medicines and the medicinal plants. In one of the hymns, a medicine has been adored thus—

तदास्त्रावस्य भेषजं तदु रोगमनीनशत्॥

—*Atharvaveda*, 2.3.3

Dhanvantri is considered to be the founder of *Āyurveda*. According to the *Matsya Purāṇa* (47.30), Dhanvantri is considered to be the thirteenth incarnation of lord Viṣṇu. He happened to be the father of Dīrghatapa and the father of Ketuman. In the Purāṇic texts, he is conceived to have been emerged out the churning of the ocean, alongwith thirteen other gems.

(xv) Yakṣa

Yakṣas have been dominating the Indian religious scene from quite an early date, and their presence is noticed in the Vedic and post-Vedic literature. They were believed to be benevolent as well as the malevolent deities. According to Coomaraswamy there was hardly any difference between the Yakṣas and the gods and the word Yakṣa stood for gods as well. Interestingly enough, the images of Yakṣas are some of the early antiquarian evidences discovered in India. The image of Yakṣa discovered from Pawaya (Madhya Pradesh) represents Yakṣa Maṇibhadra and dates back to the 1st century BC, and was adored by the people as the god.

As compared to the Brāhmaṇical literature, the Yakṣas were more popular with the Jains and they find frequent mention in the religious texts. They, indeed, were held in high esteem and each one of the Yakṣa was attached, with Yakṣī, to each one of the twenty-four Tirthaṅkaras.

Evidently the common man in ancient times did worship the Yakṣas, though the elite of the society adored the gods like Indra, Varuṇa, Bṛhaspati and others. They invoked them with the recitation of hymns and made offerings for them in the fire altars. The presence of the Yakṣas and the reverence they enjoyed from public, is amply projected in the Vedic texts. In the *Atharvaveda* one comes across a prayer to Yakṣa which entrusts the responsibility of regulating the material world over to Yakṣa. He has been equated with Brahmā. In the *Mahābhārata*, there is a festival which is celebrated in honour of a Yakṣa and is called *Brahmamaha*.

Yakṣas were considered to be the elements of minute nature which were spread over the entire universe. In the ancient India, Yakṣa was conceived as a village god who was responsible for the protection of the village. The images of such Yakṣas were placed beneath a *pipal* tree or a banyan tree over the platforms or the pedestals. The pedestal either remained empty or a conical stone was placed over it like the Śivalinga. A triangular cavity was also made for offering the lamps. The Yakṣa was invoked over the same and offerings were made to him. The ancient Yakṣa stones can still be found outside the villages.

Regular images of Yakṣas were also made and installed at the crossings or in the villages. They were considered to possess great prowess having well-built bodies. Their images were far heavier than the ordinary images. The maximum number of Yakṣa images have been discovered from Mathura and its vicinity. Evidently, it was once a great centre of the Yakṣa worship. Even Sūradāsa has mentioned about the ill effects of not adoring Jakha (Yakṣa). The right hand of such Yakṣa images is held in *abhaya-mudrā*, which reassures the devotee. In the early stage of the making of the images of Bodhisattva at Mathura, the pattern of the Yakṣa images was adopted. The names of Yakṣas are engraved over the images, which provides easy identification.

Because of possessing great strength, the Yakṣas are considered to be quite powerful. There is a mention of a Yakṣa named Moggarapāni, in the Buddhist scriptures at Mathura, who carried an iron club in his hand.

Yakṣas are also considered to be the lords of wealth who control the treasures and Kubera is considered to be the chief of the Yakṣas. He is usually depicted in art with a sack filled with riches, held in his hand. He is also described as the treasurer of the gods.

The Yakṣas are more popular with the Buddhists than the Sanskrit literature. There had been a story current in the ancient times according to which a Yakṣa or a Yakṣī used to terrorise the villagers but was defeated by Gautama who initiated him in the Buddhist religion. Thereafter the Yakṣas or the Yakṣīs became the guardians of the village. Similar thing happened with Hariti, the wife of Kubera-Yakṣa.

In the *Viṣṇudharmottara*, five Yakṣas named Maṇibhadra, Pūrṇabhadra, Dirghabhadra, Yakṣabhadra and Svabhadra, have been mentioned. It is also stated that Nala and Kubara, the two sons of Yakṣa Kubera, were redeemed from the position of trees which were uprooted by Kṛṣṇa. This story is available in the *Mahābhārata*.

The Yakṣas are closely associated with trees and water. In the art of Bharhut and Sanchi, there are several representations in which the Yakṣīs are associated with trees, standing under them. There is a beautiful story in the Vana-parvan of the *Mahābhārata*, of a Yakṣa who resides in the tree standing over the bank of a lake. The Pāṇḍava brothers arrive there one by one and four of them had to meet with their end because of their failure to answer four questions of the Yakṣa—

को मोदते किमाश्चर्यं का पन्था का च वारता।
इति मे चतुर्प्रश्नानि मृत्या जीवन्तु वान्धवा॥

Yudhiṣṭhira, the eldest of the Pāṇḍavas, gives the suitable reply to all the questions and brought his brothers back to life.

6

Female Deities

Of the female deities in the Vedic literature, it may be stated that they are only few and far between, in Vedic religion dominated by the male gods. The almost negligible number of the goddesses in the *Rgvedic* literature can hardly be explained though scholars have tried to justify the same by saying that the Vedic society was a male dominated one. Though this argument stands in good stead in so far as the contemporary socio-economic conditions are concerned, but another important aspect which has to be kept in mind is the environmental conditions in which the Aryans were placed. They possibly had to move constantly from place to place and for them the safety of themselves, their livestock, their food reserves, their chariots, the soldiers, the drummers and even the cooks were of primary importance and possibly the ladies were left to take care of the household and the internal jobs, because they could hardly be suited for outdoor or cavalry functions, much less of the safety of the houses or even the household, because the mother's care was far more necessary in bringing up a child as compared to the modern times. But an astonishing aspect of the early societies not only in India, but also of the prominent cultures of the world, had been that the adoration of the Mother Goddess was very much in vogue. The nude female figurines have been discovered from the upper Palaeolithic cultures of the world, which points to the adoration of the Mother Goddess at that early stage and the same has travelled down to the modern times in many countries of the world, particularly in India. There is a school of thought which considers India to be the homeland of the cult of the Mother Goddess, wherein clay or terracotta nude female figurines have been discovered in the Harappan culture besides the drawings in the pre-historic caves in India. Besides the evidence of the Mother Goddess, in the Harappan and pre-Harappan sites, the evidence of other male deities like Śiva have also been discovered.

Interestingly, the eminent scholars like R.S. Bist, have tried to establish that the *Rgvedic* culture had many aspects common with the Vedic culture. Another example of the comparable nature of Vedic and Harappan culture had been pointed out by M.S. Vatsa, who tried to interpret the journey of the soul after death, having been portrayed over the pottery discovered from Harappa.

With the above background, it could be stated that the adoration of the Mother Goddess, so prominently found in the Harappan culture, could also be traced in the Vedic culture in one form or the other, though the adoration of the male gods was also not as widespread as the cult of the Mother Goddess at Harappa. Possibly the religion of the Harappans was further developed by the Aryans in one form or the other assimilating it into their own. It may be recalled here that the adoration of the Mother Goddess figurines provide an impression, keeping in view the fact that these female figurines are sometimes nude, sometimes display female pregnancy and sometimes the mother carrying the child in her lap. This could go on to testify that these female figurines were adored keeping in mind the role of all caring mother.

In the Vedic literature, though the number of gods are many and are required to play dominant roles for the protection and the welfare of the society, but the female deities have their own importance. These include Aditi, Pṛthivī, Sarasvatī, Rātri, Uṣā, Bhāratī, Ilā and several others besides Lakṣmī.

1. Śrī or Lakṣmī

In general, the scholars like J.N. Banerjea believe that the concrete concept about Lakṣmī is traceable only in the later Vedic period. In the *Ṛgveda* and the other *Saṃhitās*, Śrī or Lakṣmī is not described as such. In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, however, she is mentioned in an interesting manner. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* says that Prajāpati got tired of creating beings and Śrī came forth from him, while he was thus meditating. Her beauty and resplendence made the gods envy her and they wanted to kill her, but Prajāpati dissuaded them from doing so as she was a female, and asked them to take away all her attributes from her, sparing her life. Then Agni, Soma, Varuṇa, Mitra, Indra, Bṛhaspati, Savitṛ, Puṣaṇ, Sarasvatī and Tvaṣṭṛ took from her food, kingdom, universal sovereignty, noble rank, power, body-lustre, dominions, wealth, prosperity and beautiful forms respectively. Then, on Prajāpati's advice, she after offering ten sacrificial dishes to the ten divinities got everything restored to her (XI.4.1). The inner significance of this story is not at all difficult to understand and the goddess possesses all the major good qualities covered by man. The above version of J.N. Banerjea is quite convincing but much more could be stated on the subject which could be quite relevant to the subject.

Of these, the goddess Śrī or Lakṣmī is not mentioned in the *Ṛgveda* but is found present in the fifteen hymns appended to the regular collection of hymns of the fifth Maṇḍala of the *Ṛgveda*. Some of the passages of the *Ṛgveda* adoring Śrī or Lakṣmī are noted hereunder—

(i) Bestower of riches, prosperity and well-being

Some of the passages highlighting the above qualities of the goddess are given hereunder—

- (a) ता नव चोदयत् श्रिये। —*Ṛgveda*, I.188.8

“Excite, inspire as for the increase of well-being”.

- (b) अस्य श्रिये समिधानस्य वृष्णो। —*Ibid.*, IV.5.15

“The bull (Agni) enkindled for the benefit of the sacrificer”.

- (c) श्रीनामुदारो धरुणो रयीणां। —*Ibid.*, X.45.5

“Agni is the keeper of the riches and gives away liberally various kinds of prosperity”.

- (d) देवैस्तश्रिया —*Ibid.*, III.48.19

“Puṣaṇ is equal with other gods in bestowing wealth, riches and prosperity”.

- (e) युवोर्विश्वा अधिश्रिय पृक्षश्च॥ —*Ibid.*, I.139.3

“The Aśvins are in possession of all the benefits, prosperity, refreshments or nourishments”.

(ii) *Śrī in combination with Soma*

आसुते सिंचतश्चित्रं रोदस्यो रमि श्रियं। दसा दधीत वृषभं।

—*Ibid.*, VIII.72.13

“Milk and water are the two ingredients added to Soma juice. With reference to the milk it is said—pour the splendour (Śrī) upon the pressed out Soma juice. For sweetening and invigorating (enriching the Soma Juice, milk was added to it). With reference to the admixture of milk with Soma, it is said, Here pouring out of Śrī upon Soma juice can only mean sweetening and enriching the Soma juice”.

(iii) *Śrī as Beauty or Superiority*

(a) युवो श्रियंपरि योषावृणीत।

—*Ibid.*, VII.69.4

“The maiden, the daughter of Sūryā made choice of Śrī of the Aśvins. Aśvins are the two husbands of Sūryā. She chose them because of their Śrī. Here ‘beauty’ cannot be taken to be the only meaning of Śrī—rather here Śrī would mean their superiority or pre-eminence”.

In the *Samhitās* of the *Yajurveda* one comes across the mention of Śrī in a different context. At the time of a man’s departure from the world and attaining heaven, he is said to have attained Śrī—

(a) श्रीहि मनुष्यस्य सुवर्गो लोको।

—*Taittirīya Samhitā*, 7.4.4.2

“For a man the world of heaven is Śrī (prosperity)”.

(b) स एनं आशिष्टं श्रियं अभिप्रणयति।

—*Kāthaka Samhitā*, 12.13

“A goat is prescribed to be sacrificed to Vāyu for attaining Śrī”.

(iv) *Śrī as Victory*

In the *Atharvaveda*, the use of the term Śrī appears in a different context. The proclamation of victory in the war through the beating of the drum distributes Śrī—

श्रेयी बच्चानो।

—*Atharvaveda*, V.20.9

“Śrī here is connected with *bhuti* meaning growth, thriving and material prosperity. Mother Earth is invoked to the sacrificer well established in Śrī and Bhuti”.

Besides the above, there are several instances in the Vedic literature which point to the interpretation of the term Śrī in several ways. In the early Sūktas she has been projected in two forms viz., Puṇya-Lakṣmī and Pāpa-Lakṣmī. The signs or the symbols which bring fortune or good-luck are termed as Puṇya-Lakṣmī, but the signs which bring bad luck misfortune and misery are designated as Pāpa-Lakṣmī. In some of the hymns of the Vedic texts, there is a reference to Pāpa-Lakṣmī which sticks to the tree like creepers. The Pāpa-Lakṣmī ultimately becomes Alakṣmī of the later age and carried all the evil traits which include misfortune, misery,

bad luck in one's life. The concept of Puṇya-Lakṣmī or Śiva-Lakṣmī can be traced in the *Atharvaveda* (VII.15.3; IV.1.18.1) that Lakṣmī, which leads to the route of prosperity, thriving, well-being or opulence is taken to be Bhadra, Śiva or Puṇya-Lakṣmī. So one gets anxious to get such Lakṣmī in one's life which would lead one to a prosperous state. Different rites were prescribed to get rid of Pāpa-Lakṣmī so that one could enjoy a Puṇya-Lakṣmī.

2. Lakṣmī in Śrī Sūkta

Lakṣmī and Śrī appear as two separate deities right from *Vājasneyī Samhitā* (31.22) onwards, the earliest text eulogising Śrī and Lakṣmī as two different divinities in the Śrī Sūkta which forms the chapter-2, varga-6-6, of the Khilas appended to the *Ṛgveda*. Like other Khilas, it is handed over in a larger number of manuscripts as *puṣṭivardhana*, "promoter of prosperity" (*Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, 2.128.2) and is used in different rituals, it attracted the attention of the different Vedas. Though certain *mantras* of the Sūkta were used in part or as a whole in different Vedic texts, the compilers of the other Vedas were also anxious to have Śrī-Sūkta of their own. This could be the reason for the variations in the Śrī-Sūktas of the Vedas. The Śrī-Sūkta of the *Yajurveda* occurs in the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* (2.7.7.2). The glimpses of the Śrī-Sūkta of the different Vedas are brought out as under—

- (i) *Ṛgveda*, VIII.99 रथे अक्षेषु वृषभस्य वाजे, वाते पजन्ये वर्णस्य सुष्मे।
इन्द्रं या देवि सुभगाजजाना सा न आयन वर्चसा संविदाना॥
- (ii) *Sāmaveda* The third *mantra* of the *Ṛgveda* (8.99) which is repeated in the *Sāmaveda* (III.267.5).
- (iii) *Atharvaveda* A *mantra* of the *Apastamba Śrauta Sūtra* (4.7.4) is included in the Śrī-Sūkta of the *Atharvaveda*.

Thus the adoration of the goddess Śrī or Lakṣmī continued from the Vedic period to the *Brāhmaṇas*, *Gṛhya Sūtra* times and travelling further distance she was patronised even by the epics and the *Purāṇas*, where she was conceived as the consort of Viṣṇu and her origin was traced from the churning of the ocean. The *Purāṇas* testify that she emerged from the ocean with the fourteen gems recovered from the churning of the ocean—

लक्ष्मी कौस्तुभ पारिजातकसुरा धन्वन्तरी चन्द्रमा
गावा कामदुधा सुरेशगजो रम्भादि दैत्याङ्गना।
अश्वा सप्त मुखा विषं हरि धनु शङ्खोमृतं चाम्बधो
रत्नानीति चतुर्दशं प्रतिदिनं देयात् सदा मङ्गलम्॥

This is not the only evidence of the origin of Lakṣmī in the Purāṇic texts. Some of them describe the origin of Lakṣmī differently, but the texts of *Brahma Purāṇa* (13.18), *Harivaṃśa Purāṇa* (18.73), *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* (2.69.33), *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (94.33) and *Matsya Purāṇa* (43.35) speak about her emerging out of the churning of the ocean.

The emerging of Lakṣmī out of the churning of the ocean is also testified in three south Indian manuscripts of the *Rāmāyaṇa* as under—

ततो दीर्घेन कालेन चोत्पन्ना कमलालया॥
 अतीवरूप सम्पन्ना प्रथमे वयसि स्थितः।
 सर्वाभरणपूर्णाङ्गी नीलकुचिन्त मूर्धजा॥
 तप्तहाटक संकाशा मुक्ताभरणभूषिता।
 कन्या यस्याप्रभावेन इन्द्र ऐश्वर्यमाप्नुयात्॥
 चतुर्भुजा महादेवी पद्महस्त वरानना।
 सा च देवी तथोत्पन्ना पद्मा श्री लोक विश्रुता॥
 सा पद्मा पद्मनाभस्य ययौ वक्षस्थलं हरे॥

In order, however, to understand the true character of Lakṣmī, one has to refer to her iconographical features. Lakṣmī is represented alone as well as with Viṣṇu. When alone, she is found standing over a lotus pedestal, wearing garland of lotus, holding lotus in her hands; the elephants of the quarters pour water from inverted jars and a bird serves as her vehicle. Interestingly the objects and the animals attached to her have close resemblance with her nature. The association of the lotus is quite significant. She is called Padminī; she stands over a lotus, *padmasthita*; she has the complexion of lotus and as such she is called *padmavarṇa*. She, however, continues to maintain her association with the lotus even upto the modern times. It is stated in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (1.9.100), that she emerged out of the ocean seated over a full blown lotus, holding lotus in her hand. When the goddess is represented in sculpture either with four hands or two hands, she is required to hold lotuses in her hand (*Viṣṇudharmottara*, 3.82.2-6: *Matsya Purāṇa*, 252.12). The lotus is associated with the goddess from quite on early age. The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (37.5), besides *Varāha Purāṇa* (79.1), describe about a lake known as Śrīsara which grows the unfading type of lotuses named Mahāpadma, which is surrounded by other sweet scented lotuses. Goddess Lakṣmī is said to be residing over the Mahāpadmas of the lake. Śrīsara is further surrounded by Śrīvana. Abounding in *bilva* trees and the goddess is said to be worshipped by her devotees there.

The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (1.9.103), points out that the goddess emerged out of the oceanic waters, the elephants of the quarters sprinkled water of the Gaṅgā over her. The elephant like the horse is an ancient symbol of the water cosmogony. The elephant indeed is an animal of adoration.

When Lakṣmī is shown standing alone, she has to be four armed in which she should hold a nectar vase in one hand and *bilva* fruit in the other; the remaining two hands should hold a conch and a lotus (*Viṣṇudharmottara*, 3.82.5-7). She can of course be represented with two or four hands.

Establishing the supremacy of the goddess Lakṣmī, it has been stated in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (1.8.17), that like lord Viṣṇu, who is considered to be superior-most of all the gods, similarly Lakṣmī, who can never be separated from Viṣṇu is the best of all the goddesses—

नित्यैवेष्टा जगन्माता विष्णौ श्रीरत्नपायिनी।
 यथा सर्वगतो विष्णु तथैवयं द्विजोत्तम॥

Lakṣmī is also known by several other names like Śrī, Padmā, Kamalā, and many of her traits characterise her full of lotuses, serving her as her seat besides being the hand attributes or even ornaments. Among the various *lakṣaṇas* of Lakṣmī, the one quoted in the *Amśubhedāgama* could be typical, according to which "the complexion of Lakṣmī has to be golden yellow. She is to be adorned with golden ornaments studded with rubies and other precious gems. In her ears, there should be jewelled *nakrakunḍalas*. The figure of Lakṣmī has to be like a maiden who has just attained age and should be of very handsome appearance, with pretty eyebrows, eyes like the lotus petals, a full neck and a developed waist. She should wear a bodice and be adorned with various ornaments on the head. In the right hand she should carry a lotus flower and in her left hand a *bilva* fruit; she should be clad in fine garments and her back should be broad and attractive. The waist zone should be a broad belt of artistic workmanship and should heighten the effect of the natural beauty".

Indeed, the description of Lakṣmī of the *Viṣṇudharmottara* happens to be the combination of Mahālakṣmī and Gajalakṣmī according to our systematisation. It, however, gives an important injunction regarding the allocation of her arms; her figure should have only two hands when she is to accompany her husband Viṣṇu. But when she has to be adored in a separate temple, she should have four hands, and should be seated or standing over a lotus of eight petals placed over a lion-throne.

This brings us to Hemādri's description of *Simhavāhinī* Lakṣmī, who represents a Śaiva Lakṣmī (to distinguish her from Vaiṣṇava Lakṣmī or Vaiṣṇavī aspect—thus two types emerge). In this case she is sculptured with four hands with the symbols of a lotus with a stalk, *keyūra* (armlet), a *bilva* and a conch alongwith the vase of nectar by her left side and be seated in a lotus vehicle. Here the word *Simhāsana*, though ordinarily means seated over a lion seat, but a sculpture from Khajuraho illustrates the goddess Lakṣmī seated on a lion. The *Viṣṇudharmottara* also describes Śrī as of dark complexion—कालिकाकृति—and provides other attributes of the exuberance of lotuses alongwith that of गजोत्क्षिप्त-घटप्लुता which is to be noticed ahead in the Gajalakṣmī aspect of her. According to *Śilparatna* she should be represented blooming with white complexion. She should be attended by two maidens as *chowrī*-bearers.

3. Alakṣmī

In the tenth Maṇḍala of the *R̥gveda*, the term Alakṣmī appears in the context of a sign or a mark—*bhadra-eśā Lakṣmāḥ nihitadhavaci* (*R̥gveda*, X.71.2) which means their speech retains the blessed sign imprinted. The epithet applied to Lakṣmī in this context is *bhadra*. In the *Atharvaveda*, Lakṣmī is described from two aspects, where she is known as *Puṇya* or *Pāpa-Lakṣmī*. Like several of the hymns of the *Atharvaveda*, meant to drive away evil spirits by the magical devices or with the application of different means for driving out *Pāpa-Lakṣmī*, possibly this is the stage where the concept of Alakṣmī came in vogue. Possibly when Lakṣmī was conceived as the goddess of beauty, riches and of abundance, *Pāpa-Lakṣmī* got completely segregated from her and came to be adored for a different purpose *viz.*, to ward off evil, which would be evident from the following passage—

प्र पतेतः पापि लक्ष्मी नश्येत प्रामुतः पत।
अयस्मयेनाकन द्विषते त्वा सजामसि।।

—*Atharvaveda*, VII.115.1

"Fly forth from here, O evil sign (Pāpa-Lakṣmī), disappear from here; fly forth from yonder; with a hook of metal we attach you to him that hates us".

Thus Pāpa-Lakṣmī was considered to be a terribly harmful deity for the society. She was conceived to be a flying substance sticking to one's body like a creeper to a tree—

या मा लक्ष्मीः पतयातु रजुष्ठाभिचस्कन्द वन्दनेव वृक्षम्।
अन्य त्रास्मात् सवितस्तामितो धा हिरण्यहस्तोवसु गो नरम्॥

—*Ibid.*, VII.115.2

During the course of time, the following of Pāpa-Lakṣmī or Alakṣmī underwent a gradual change and other deities took her place. One of her successors was known by the name of Jyeṣṭha, who had been quite popular in the south and Gopinatha Rao (*Elements of Hindu Iconography*, Vol. I, Part-II, pp. 390 ff) has discussed about her quite elaborately—

"The worship of Jyeṣṭha Devī appears to be very old. The *Baudhāyana Gṛhya Sūtra* contains a chapter dealing with the worship of the goddess. One of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava Alvars (Saints) called Tondar-adippodi, meaning the dust of the feet of the God's devotees, refers to the worship offered to this goddess by the people in the vain hope of acquiring the fulfilment of their desires, while there is the great god Viṣṇu, the conferor of all the boons, whom they forget altogether. We know of several temples in which the image of this Devī is still seen to be occupying a corner, though not receiving any worship; in many other temples the image of this goddess is pulled out of the seat and thrown away; and even educated people do not understand what this rejected piece of sculpture is intended to represent. Strange stories are concocted in modern times with the image of Jyeṣṭha Devī; and they are introduced into the *Sthalapurāṇas*. In a place called Nangapuram in the Trichirapoly District, there is a Śiva temple belonging to the Chola period. It is known to have been built in honour of the Chola princess. The first part of the name of the village means a maiden referring evidently to Aringigai, the Chola princess. The people of the village point to an image of Jyeṣṭha Devī and assert that it represents a Chola princess who was born with the face of a jackal. The story is that the king feeling sorry for the deformation of his child prayed to god that her jackal-face might be removed from her. Then his god appeared to him in a dream and told him that if he built a temple of Śiva in the village Nangapuram, and made his daughter visit and worship the god set up in it she would immediately lose the face of the jackal and obtain instead the normal face of a woman. This, they say, happened accordingly and in proof of the correctness of the story, they direct our attention to the figure with the bull's face on the right of Jyeṣṭha Devī and say that it is the princess before she visited the temple and lost her face and the figure to the left of this is the lady as she became after she

offered worship to Śiva in the newly constructed temple. They, however, give no explanation at all about the central figure”.

According to the description of Jyeṣṭha Devī as given in *Sanskrit* texts, she is a goddess with two arms and two eyes, with big cheeks and large pendulous breasts descending as far as the navel with a flabby body, thick thighs, raised nose, hanging lower lip and is in dark complexion as the ink. Her legs have to be hanging down in front of the *bhadrāsana* over which she is to be seated. Her hair is done up in a knot and on the forehead a *tilakam* is marked. She wears a *mukuta* over her head; in her right hand she holds a *nīlotpala* flower and the other hand has to rest upon the seat. One authority, however, says that she should carry a *nīlotpala* in one hand and keep the other in *abhaya* pose. In actual sculptures, she is often seen displaying *abhaya* pose with right hand.

In the Tamil *Nighaṇṭu* the names of Jyeṣṭha Devī are given as under—

“Mygade, Tanvai, Kāladi, Mudevi, the crow-bannered, the ass-rider, Kaltai, the bad woman and Ekaveni. Her weapon is said to be the sweeping broom”.

According to the *Līṅga Purāṇa*, when the ocean of milk was churned to obtain nectar for the gods, the poison Kālakuṭa which was all destroying cosmic poison, came out first from the ocean, then emerged Jyeṣṭha Devī. A Brāhmaṇa ascetic named Dussaha married her and was taking her home with him. He perceived in her on the way a peculiar trait which he was unable to comprehend. He noticed her closing her ears, whenever, there was the singing of the priase of Viṣṇu or the uttering of the prayer offered to Śiva or any other good thing was being mentioned or done. Once upon a time, he was sent with his wife to the forest for *tapas*, but the lady could not endure to see him so engaged and consequently left him alone there and quietly returned home. The poor sage had to promise to her that he would never engage himself to any virtuous acts, which were displeasing to her before he could reside with her in his house. By about that time the Sage Mārkaṇḍeya arrived there and the poor Dussaha narrated his ordeal to him about his wife. He then asked Mārkaṇḍeya a way out. Mārkaṇḍeya then advised the ascetic that he should take his wife always to inauspicious places. The ascetic then called his wife and told her that he was leaving for good in the netherworld and she should remain alone wandering at will. Thereafter the lady kept on wandering and once she met lord Viṣṇu who provided her some respite.

According to J.N. Banerjea (*Development of Hindu Iconography*, pp. 383-84), even Viṣṇu had to mutter *Rudra-mantra* once, in order to protect himself from the baneful influence of Jyeṣṭha, also known as Alakṣmī. It is sometimes especially prescribed in the texts that the devotees of Viṣṇu and women should offer oblation to Jyeṣṭha. This popular myth was evidently conceived with a deep sectarian bias and unwittingly hints at the manner of the introduction of such goddess cults among the orthodox believers. The mode of her substance suggested by her husband remained one of that of Jarā and Haritī.

Rao tells us that the adoration of this goddess is practically obsolete now in southern India. But the ground lost by Jyeṣṭha in her husband was granted by her under another name Śītālā

in the eastern and the western parts of India—Bengal, Orissa, Gujarat. Sītālā is worshipped in these parts as the goddess of small-pox and has many affinities with Hariti, the Buddhist goddess, especially from the point of view of her iconographic and other details. The well-known *Praṇām-mantra* contains a few notable characteristics of Jyeṣṭha—Sītālā also has an ass as a vehicle. She has the emblems like the broom and a pitcher and is adorned with winnowing fan on her head. The inauspicious Jyeṣṭha may also be particularly recognised in the temporary image (only in crude outline) of Alakṣmī made of cowdung which is worshipped occasionally.

4. The Mother

The concept of Motherhood was in the mind of the Vedic people and this could possibly be the reason for the Vedic people to adore a number of goddesses, though in different forms. Each goddess, by whichever name was she called, represented a form of Śakti or motherhood. Of course, the Vedic ritualism was dominated by the male deities and worship of gods. This being so, only a few hymns were addressed individually to a goddess, but rarely. One entire hymn has been addressed to the goddess Rātri and Pṛthivī, while Sarasvatī has three hymns. Uṣās, however, towers above them all since as many as twenty hymns are addressed to her. Therefore, the theory of the indifference of the Vedic seers to female stands disproved with the mention of a large number of female deities in the *Ṛgveda*. There are names of as many as forty goddesses found in the *Ṛgveda*, which include Uṣā, Rātri, Rākā, Gaṅgā, Pṛthivī, Aditi, Diti, Svāti, Revatī, Puraṇdhī, Apadevī, Sarasvatī, Sindhu, Indrāṇī, Varuṇī, Rudrāṇī, Āgneyī, Saranyū, Sūryā, Śacī, Śaḍasi, Sītā, Śraddhā, Dhiṣṇa, Ilā, Mahi, Bhāratī, Gaurī, Svāhā, Urvaśī, Alakṣmī, Niṣṭi, and so on. Some of the female deities have a very interesting character and bring out in a striking manner the inner feelings of the mind of the Vedic seers. The conception of Aditi shows that the supreme being was conceived of a female. This aspect raises her to a height, which even the mightiest of the Vedic gods could hardly reach.

If an analysis is made of the nature of such goddesses, as Aditi, Uṣā, Sarasvatī etc., one cannot fail to recognise the importance ascribed to them by the ancient seers of the country. Aditi, the divine mother, is concerned prominently with the removal of the sins, sometimes alone and sometimes with Mitra and Varuṇa. She gives wealth free from sin and hatred (*Ṛgveda*, I.185.3). She relieves men from the net of enemy (*Ibid.*, VIII.67.11) and is also invoked for protection (*Ibid.*, X.36.3). She is without enemies (*Ibid.*, II.60.6). The seer says, "O goddess, dear to many people, if you cannot grant protection, no one else can do it".

Her association with Varuṇa and Mitra who are *Dhrtavratas* and with Sītā (*Ibid.*, VII.18.4) proves the ethnical and abstract nature of her conception. This point goes on to prove a very early origin of Aditi among the *Ṛgvedic* gods. Her epithets are pervasive, and all finders indicate (VIII.25.7-8) her superiority over other goddesses. Her harmlessness and superiority may be indicated by her description as an immaculate cow and as the one without enemy (*Ibid.*, V.46.6) as well as by the emphasis laid on the absence of hatred or *himsā* in her (*Ibid.*, VII.66.6).

It is Aditi who bears the sun by immaculate conception and brings forth all life in the universe (*Atharvaveda*, 13.2.9). From her were born the gods, Gandharvas, human beings and

all other creatures. She is therefore, the mother of all (*Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*, 10.1.2). She is also identified with Earth (Pṛthivī) and Dyāvā-Pṛthivī. In her concept of all mother, who is not only the mother of man, and all created things, but also the cause of all the created things, past, present and future from whom springs all life and to whom it returns after death, was developed.

Aditi has the honour of being almost the only goddess mentioned by name in the *Ṛgveda*, as the mother of any of the gods; but it is by no means an easy task to delineate her character, as the most contradictory statements are made concerning her. She was invoked as the bestower of blessings on children and cattle; and she is clearly declared to be the mother of Varuṇa, and other deities, sometimes eight, sometimes twelve in number. She is supposed to be the impersonation of "infinity, especially the boundlessness of heaven, in opposition to the fitness of earth". Another supposition is that Aditi is the personification of "universal, all-embracing nature or Being". This latter idea seems to be the more correct from the following verses, where a man about to be immolated says, "Of which god, now, of which of the immortals shall we invoke the amiable name, who shall give us back to the great Aditi, that I may behold my father and my mother?" Whatever may have been intended by the poets to be expressed by this name, or whatever may have been the precise power personified by Aditi, she is connected with the forgiveness of sin. Thus—"May Aditi make us sinless". "Aditi be gracious, if we have committed any sin against you". "Whatever offence we have, O Agni, through our folly committed against you, oh, most youthful god make us free from sins against Aditi". "Whatever sin we have committed may Aditi sever us from it".

In the account of the creation given in the Vedic literature, Aditi is said to have sprung from Dakṣa, and in some hymns Dakṣa is called to be her son. There is also a reference to her other sons. In the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, we have no less than three somewhat differing accounts of the origin of Dakṣa, the father of Aditi. In the first account, Dakṣa's name appears amongst the mind-born sons of Brahmā; and in this connection he is said to have had twenty-four daughters, but Aditi is not mentioned as one of them. In the second account of Dakṣa, Aditi is said to have been one of his sixty daughters, and was given in marriage to Kaśyapa, by whom she had twelve sons, the Ādityas. Elsewhere we read that Viṣṇu, when incarnated as the Dwarf, was a result of this marriage. In the third account of Dakṣa, Aditi is again mentioned as his daughter, and the mother of Vivasvat.

She has been described to be the mother of eight Ādityas in the *Ṛgveda* (अष्टयोनिरदितिरष्ट पुत्रा। *Atharvaveda*, VIII.9.21). She has also been described as the mother of Mitra, Varuṇa, and Aryamān in the *Ṛgveda* (VIII.47.9) (माता मित्रस्यरेवतोऽयर्मणोवरुणस्य चा).

There is another hymn called the Śrī-Sūkta which forms an appendix to the Khila-Sūkta of the *Ṛgveda*. The hymn contains fifteen passages in which the goddess is invoked. She is conceived to be of the complexion of the red lotus flowers. Comprehensive details of the goddess have already been discussed.

The sublime concept of Vak outlined in the Devī-Sūkta is found in one of the greatest and at the same time simplest expositions of the concept of the divine energy inherent in everything,

in god, men and animals. This hymn as well the hymn associated with Rātri came to occupy a very prominent position in the rituals of the subsequent times. Therefore, the developed Śakti worship of the epic and Purāṇic times was indebted to these goddess concepts but the very idea underlying the word Śakti was based on central theme of the Devī-Sūkta. But this is also true that such names as Ambikā, Umā, Durgā, Kālī, etc. which came to designate singly or collectively the central figure of the Śakti cult, do not occur in the *Ṛgveda*. These names are found in the later Vedic texts. Ambikā appears first as the sister of Rudra in the *Vājasneyi Samhitā* and the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* (1.6.10), and then as his consort in the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* (X.18). The *Kena Upaniṣad* (III.25) refers to Umā Hemāvati as the personified *Brahmavidyā* (the knowledge about Brahman). Kālī and Karālī are mentioned in the *Māṇḍuka Upaniṣad* (I.2.4) as two of the seven tongues of Agni, the other being Manojavā, Sulobita, Sudhūmravarṇā, Sphuliṅginī and Viśvaruci. Here the number is seven which could be the forerunner of the concept of the seven Divine mothers or *sapta-mātrikas*. The names of the goddesses like Bhadrakālī, Bhavānī, Durgā etc. are found in the later Vedic literature like the *Sāṃkhāyana* and *Hiraṇyakeśi Gṛhya Sūtras* and in the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*. Evidently the seeds of the mother-cult which were available in the early Vedic literature were developed in the subsequent period.

In the *Ṛgveda* the forest-goddess Aranyānī is invoked as the mother of the beasts, who represented the forest as a whole, abounding in food without tillage etc. In northern India, she was known as Vanaspati, or the Mistress of wood or Banaspati Mā. She is said to be kept under control by offering a tree branch or a stone as a tribute to her dreaded presence. Among the Paṇḍya forest tribe there is a goddess known by the name of Kād Bhagavatī (who also is known as a sizeless deity called Kullī) is a malignant goddess dwelling in trees.

In the matriarchal system the veneration and the love for mother culminated in her worship as mother. It is this incontrovertible fact which made the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* to prescribe *mātri-devo-bhava* and *pitra-devo-bhava*. However, in the Vedic literature, comparatively later in date than the *Ṛgveda*, the mother-goddess is mentioned in one form or the other as would be evident from the following tabulation—

Title of Text	Form of Mother Goddess
1. <i>Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa</i> (2.6.3.4; 2.6.2.9)	Ambikā
2. <i>Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa</i> (1.6.10)	Ambikā
3. <i>Kena Upaniṣad</i> (2.25)	Umā Hemavati
4. <i>Śvetāśvatārā Upaniṣad</i> (IV.10.1; VI.8.3)	Māyā
5. <i>Saubhāgya Lakṣmī Upaniṣad</i> (V.4.1.12)	Mahālakṣmī, Śrīvidyā
6. <i>Neo Upaniṣad</i>	Mahālakṣmī
7. <i>Guhakālī Upaniṣad</i> (V.42.46)	Mahādevī
8. <i>Devī Upaniṣad</i> (Verses 1,10,17)	Brahmasvarūpiṇī, Mahāvidyā, Viśvarūpiṇī.

Title of Text	Form of Mother Goddess
9. <i>Sitopaniṣad</i> (V.1)	Prakṛti
10. <i>Tripuratāpiṇi Upaniṣad</i> (1.1)	Tripuratāpiṇi, Śrividya
11. <i>Bhavarichopaniṣad</i> (Verse-8)	Mahātripurasundarī, Bālāmbikā, Bagalā, Mātāṅgī, Svayambarā, Kalyāṇi, Bhuvaneśvarī, Cāmuṇḍā, Caṇḍā, Varāhī, Tiraskāriṇi, Raja Mātāṅgī, Śuka Śyāmalā, Laghu Śyāmalā, Aśvaruḍhā, Dhūmavati, Sāvitrī, Sarasvatī, Brahmāṇḍa Kālī.
12. <i>Māṇḍukopaniṣad</i> (1.2.4)	Devī
13. <i>Taittirīya Saṁhitā</i> (3.53)	Ambikā
14. <i>Vājasneyi Saṁhitā</i> (3.53)	Ambikā
15. <i>Sāṁkhāyana Gṛhya Sūtra</i> (2.14.1a)	Durgā, Jyeṣṭha
16. <i>Taittirīya Āraṇyaka</i> (10.17, 10.18)	Ambikāpati-Rudra, Durgā, Kātyāyāni, Vairocanī, Kanyākumārī
17. <i>Baudhāyana Gṛhya Sūtra</i> (3.3.2.9)	Durgā, Jyeṣṭha
18. <i>Baudhāyana Dharma Sūtra</i> (2.5.6)	Durgā, Jyeṣṭha
19. <i>Sāṁkhāyana Śrauta Sūtra</i> (4.20)	Durgā, Jyeṣṭha
20. <i>Manusmṛti</i> (3.89)	Bhadrakālī
21. <i>Mṛcchakaṭikā</i>	Ambikā

5. Āgnāyī

Āgnāyī is mentioned in the *Ṛgveda* as a spouse of the god Agni—

इहेन्द्राणीमुपह्वये वरुणानींस्तवस्तये। अग्नार्यीं सोमपीतये।।

—*Ṛgveda*, I.22.12

(For our welfare as well as for the drinking of Soma, we invoke Indrāṇī, the spouse of Varuṇa and Āgnāyī, the spouse of Agni.)

Besides the above there is a mention of the wives of gods in *Ṛgveda* (V.46.7) as well as the *Atharvaveda* (XX. 35.8).

6. Indrāṇī

Of Indrāṇī, the wife of Indra (also called Śacī), very little is said. In the *Ṛgveda*, we read, “Among all females Indrāṇī is the most fortunate; for her husband shall not at any future time die of old age”. This may be explained by the fact that Indrāṇī is wife to all who may successively attain to the throne of Indra. There is always someone ruling in heaven; the office is perpetual, and as she is the wife of the reigning king, whoever he may be, her husband can never die of old age. Though kings may come and go, she continues to be queen. She is said

to have a son, Citragupta by name, who was born of a cow; for, owing to a curse pronounced by Umā, none of the goddesses could become a mother. She practised austerities, in order that she might not be childless; and by means of this expedient her desire was gratified. At the birth of this child, the reputed mother suffered all the pains attendant on childbirth, and was able to nurse the child when born.

7. Uṣās

This goddess, representative of the Dawn, is a favourite object of celebration with the Vedic poets, and "the hymns addressed to her are among the most beautiful—if not the most beautiful—in the entire collection". She is described as the daughter of the sky, has Night for her sister, and is related to Varuṇa. She is at times spoken of as the wife of the Sun; at other times Agni is given as her lover; the Aśvins are her friends. Indra is at one time regarded as her creator; at another time he assumes a hostile position, and even crushed her chariot with his thunderbolt.

Uṣās is said to travel in a shining chariot drawn by ruddy horses or cows. Like a beautiful maiden dressed by her mother, a dancing girl covered with jewels, a gaily-attired wife appearing before her husband, or a beautiful girl coming from her bath, she, smiling and confiding in the irresistible power of her attractions, unfolds her bosom to the gaze of the beholders. She dispels the darkness, disclosing the treasures it concealed. She illuminates the world, revealing its most distant extremities. She is the life and health of all things, causing the birds to fly from their nests, and like a young housewife, awaking all her creatures, sends them forth to the pursuit of their varied occupations. She does good service to the gods, by causing the worshippers to awake, and the sacrificial fires to be lighted. She is asked to arouse only the devout and liberal, while she allows the niggardly to sleep on. She is young, being born every day; and yet she is old, being immortal, wearing out the lives of successive generations, which disappear one after another, whilst she continues undying. The souls of the departed are said to go to her and to the sun.

In the later writings we find merely the name of Uṣās. The people lost much of their poetic fire; hence the more human and practical deities caused the more poetical ones to pass into oblivion. Some of the figures in the preceding extracts are most beautifully drawn. The changing colours of the dawn are compared to the many-coloured robes of the dancing girl; the golden tipped clouds that appear are the sunshines in his strength, are like the jewels of a bride decked for her husband; whilst the quite modesty of the dawn herself is like a shy maiden, conscious indeed of her beauty, entering society under the protection of her mother. And from the last four lines of the metrical sketch it will be noticed, that she was believed to be able to bestow upon her worshippers cattle, horses, sons, health, joy, and length of days.

8. Rati

He happens to be an insignificant god of the *R̥gveda*, wherein the 179th Sūkta of the first Maṇḍala is devoted to him. In this the episode of the sage Agastya and his wife Lopamudrā's

conjugal life is mentioned. In the *Purāṇas*, however, Rati has been treated as a female and the wife of the god of love. Sāyaṇa, the commentator, has also accepted the godhood of Rati.

9. Rākā

In the second Maṇḍala of the *Ṛgveda*, two *ṛcās* have been dedicated to the goddess, wherein she has been considered to be the goddess of the full moon. She bestows the best of the treasures besides the food which provides nourishment besides the progeny—

राकां महं सुह्वां सुष्टुती हुवे शृणोतु नः सुभगा बोधतुत्मना। सीव्यत्पः
सूचाच्छिद्य मानया ददातु वीरं शतदायमुकथ्यम्॥ —*Ṛgveda*, II.31.4

10. Urvaśī

The *Ṛgveda* bestows godhood to Urvaśī in the ninety-fifth Sūkta. It is further stated (X.33.11) that Vasiṣṭha happened to be the son of Urvaśī (उतासि मैत्रावरुणो वसिष्ठोर्वश्या ब्रह्मन् मनसोऽधिजातः). She has also been invoked with the streams (स्मन्दीभिर्वशी वा गृणातु॥ *Ibid.*, V.41.19). In the *Ṛgveda* (X.15) the conversation between Urvaśī and Pururavā, the son of her lover, is recorded. The godhood of Urvaśī is also highlighted in *Bṛhaddevatā* (7.151). Sāyaṇa, on the other hand, in his comentary has established the godhood and the *Ṛsi*-hood of Urvaśī simultaneously.

11. Apavadevi

The godhood of Apavadevi is preserved in a passage in the *Ṛgveda* (X.103.12). The same passage has been repeated in the *Atharvaveda* (III.25). She has been conceived as the one who disturbs the minds of the people and renders them inactive. She is invoked to divert her energies towards the enemies and to drown them in darkness. In the *Bṛhaddevatā* (1.112), Rātri, Agnāyī, Aranyānī, Śraddhā, Pṛthivī and Icchā are also associated with this goddess—(रात्र्यप्वाग्नाय्यारण्यानी श्रद्धेकापृथिवी तथा॥). Ācārya Sāyaṇa has also testified about this goddess.

12. Aranyānī

Aranyānī is associated with the unconscious elements of the universe. She is also known as the soul of the forest or the goddess of the forest. She has been invoked in the Sūkta-146 of the tenth Maṇḍala of the *Ṛgveda*. She has also been described as the mother of the wildlife and the deer. In spite of her being lean and thin she is said to have enough of greenery. Her presence has been described in remote and inhabitable places (अरण्यान्यरन्यन्यसौ या प्रेव नश्यसि भीखि विन्दतीह॥ *Ibid.*, X.146.1). She has been invoked in the *Bṛhaddevatā* (2.47) alongwith Rātri, Śraddhā, Uṣā, Pṛthivī and Ambā.

13. Tisro Devyāḥ

Ilā, Bhārati and Sarasvatī have been collectively mentioned as the “Three Goddesses”, who are respectively connected with the earth, space and the sky. The *Bṛhaddevatā* (3.13) has also emphasised on the subject accordingly—(अग्निमेवनुगेष्ठा तु मध्यं प्राप्ता सरस्वती। अमुं स्थिताधि लोकं

तु भारती भवति ह्यसौ॥). According to another passage of the *Rgveda* (VII.2.8), Ilā is connected with fire and the humans, Bhārati is connected with Bharatas and the divine speech and Sarasvatī is connected with the divine Madhyaloka and Sarasvatas.

14. Anumati

She is known to be the goddess who bestows welfare. The *Atharvaveda* testifies that she removes misfortune from the ladies because the task of bestowing the good fortunes has been entrusted by the gods to this goddess (‘‘निरस्मभ्यमनुमती रराणा प्रेमा देवा असाविषुसौभाग्यय॥ *Atharvaveda*, I.18.2). Anumati is usually mentioned with Sinivālī. The animals who go astray in the forest, are helped by Bṛhaspati and Sinivālī to trace their homes. Anumatidevī is invoked to keep the animals properly tied in order to dissuade them from getting astray (‘‘सिनीवाली नयत्वाग्रमेषामाजग्मुषो अनुमते नि यच्छ॥ *Ibid.*, 2.26.2). In the case of the child birth, Prajāpati, prescribes Anumati together with Sinivālī to be those who help in the formation of the embryo. In the sixth Kāṇḍa of the *Atharvaveda* (6.11.3) it is mentioned that all the three gods combined removed the embryo of a girl from the womb of a lady and transplanted it in the womb of other lady and in its place transplanted the embryo of a male child (प्रजापतिरनुमति सिनीवात्य चीकलुप्त। स्त्रैषु यमन्यत्र दधत्सुमांसमु दधदिह॥). In the Vedic literature Anumati is believed to represent the full-moon night and Sinavali as the dark or moonless night.

15. Amāvāsyā

Amāvāsyā has been endowed with the position of godhood in the *Atharvaveda*, though the word *Amā* has been used in the *Rgveda* about twelve times or so, but the same has been used as a home, or nearness or togetherness. Amāvāsyā, however, has been invoked by the seers of the *Atharvaveda* as an adorable goddess, who bestowed the prowess to Vasus, besides the bestower of progress and health (अगजात्री सगमनी वसूनामूर्ज पुष्टं वस्वावेशयन्ती अमावस्यायै हविषा ‘‘ न आगन्॥ 7.84.3). Besides, Amāvāsyā has been termed as the fortunate one, who should be patronised by all. She bestows on the performer of the *yajña* riches and valorous sons.

16. Arundhati

This is the name of a medicinal plant, which has been included in the class of gods. She is also known by the name of Silācī and Lakṣa. She has been described to be the daughter of mother Rātri, and father Sky, while Aryamā happens to be her grand father in the *Atharvaveda* (5.5.1) (रात्री माता नभः पितार्यमा ते पितामह। सिलाची नाम व असि सा देवानामसि स्वसा॥). She has also been described as the sister of the gods. Arundhati is also known as *sparṇī-ṛṣadhi*, which is extracted from several trees. The medicine called Arundhati is useful for several ailments, besides the rejoining of the broken limbs. She is also invoked for the removal of miseries.

17. Sitā

The godhood of Sitā is preserved in the *Rgveda* and the *Atharvaveda*. She is considered to be the goddess of fields. In other dictionaries, she has been defined as the blade of the plough.

In the *R̥gveda*, Sītā has been invoked for bestowing the best of fruits and treasures—अर्वाची सुभगे भव सीते वन्दामहे त्वा। (*R̥gveda*, IV.57.6). Since she is conceived to be the goddess of the abundance in produce, she has been called as Subhagā in the *Atharvaveda* (सीते वन्दामहे त्वार्वाची सुभगे भव। सुफला भव।। *Atharvaveda*, 3.17.8). Sītā is said to be irrigated with *ghee* and honey (घृतेन सीता मधुना समक्ता पिन्वमाना। *Atharvaveda*, 3.17.9). The godhood of Sītā has been brought out in the *Bṛhaddevatā*, thus—द्वे तु सीतायै षष्ठी सप्तमी च।। (5.9).

In the post-Vedic literature Sītā has been described to be the spouse of Rāma. But Nilakaṇṭha, on the basis of certain Vedic hymns, has tried to trace the godhood of Sītā from the Vedic literature. In the ninety-third Sūkta of the tenth Maṇḍala of the *R̥gveda*, there is a mention of Rāma as a king. The story of Rāma and Sītā has been elaborately discussed, besides the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, in the *Ādhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Adbhut Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata*, *Padma Purāṇa* and the *Caṇḍī Purāṇa*. In almost all the above texts, the Vedic background of the story of Sītā and Rāma has been invariably highlighted. In the *R̥gveda*, however, Sītā has been conceived as the goddess of produce from the fields and much of the connected material is available in the four Sūktas. In the *R̥gveda*, she has been invoked to bestow abundance of harvest. In the *Kaṭhaka Gṛhya Sūtra*, the *mantra* of “सीरा यज्जन्ति।” has been prescribed while in the *Pāraskara Gṛhya Sūtra*, there is a mention of *Sītā Yajña*. Thus in the north or east of the field or lighting fire at five sanctified places in the village, the purification ceremony is performed—

यस्याभावे वैदिक लौकिकानां भूतिभवति कर्मणमिन्द्र पत्नी-
मुपह्वये सीतां सा ते त्वनपायिनी भूयात् कर्मणि कर्मणि स्वाहा।।

—*Pāraskara Gṛhya Sūtra*, 2.17.4

There are, however, some passages in the *Atharvaveda*, which could be interpreted to mean Sītā of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. As for example, Sāyaṇa has described the meaning of the passage of the *Atharvaveda* (3.17.8) to mean as under—

“हे सीते त्वां वन्दामहे नमस्कुर्मः। हे सुभगे सुभाग्ये सीताभिमानि देवते।
त्वं अर्वाची अस्मदभिमुखी भव। यथा येन प्रकारेण। न अस्माकम्।
सुमना शोभनमनस्का। असः स्या। यथा येन प्रकारेण। नः अस्माकम्।
सुफला शोभनफलोपेता। भवः भवे। तथा अर्वाची भवेति सम्बन्धः।।

(O Sītā, we bow in reverence to you. O possessor of the beautiful fortune, O Sītā, you are quite a proud goddess; you should always favour us, and make our minds to develop as a result of which you should bestow good fruits to the people.)

However, Sītā has a unique personality in the epics, some faints trace of which could be noticed in the Vedic texts and possibly her personality in the epics represents her developed form, which continued in the later epic period. In the texts like the *Vāyu Purāṇa*, *Brahmaṇḍa Purāṇa*, *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* as well as *Raghuvamśa*, Rāma has been conceived as the incarnation of Viṣṇu but

the texts are silent about Sītā being the incarnation of Lakṣmī. But in the texts like *Harivaṁśa* (1.41), *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (9.10), *Brahma Purāṇa* (213.129), *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (3.28.13), *Padma Purāṇa* (6.269.99), Sītā has been equated with Lakṣmī. In the *Rāmapūrvatāpīṇi Upaniṣad*, Sītā has been conceived to be the form of nature, initially. Subsequently, Sītā has also been conceived as *Mūla Prakṛti* as well. In the literature of comparatively later period, Sītā is also conceived as *Yogamāyā* or *Paramaśakti*. The *Ādhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* is indeed quite vocal in this respect—

एषा सा जानकी लक्ष्मी योगमायेति विश्रुता। —(2.5.11)

मूल प्रकृतिरित्येके प्राहुर्नयिति केचन॥ —(3.3.2)

There are several other references emphasising on the theory of Pārvatī incarnating in the form of Sītā. It is mentioned in the *Saura Purāṇa*, that Pārvatī was pleased with Janaka for his *tapas* as a result of which she was born to him as his daughter—

पार्वत्यंशसमद्भवा जनकेन पुरा गौरी तपसा तोषिता यतः॥ —(30.50)

According to the *Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa* (Chapter 36), though Sītā is considered to be separate from Lakṣmī, but Lakṣmī herself is considered to be an *aṁśa* of the goddess. According to the Maheśvara Khaṇḍa (8.95) of *Skanda Purāṇa*, Brahmavidyā incarnated on earth in the form of Sītā. In the Brahma Khaṇḍa of the same *Purāṇa*, in the context of the *Setumāhātmya*, different roles of Sītā have been spelt out. Accordingly, she is conceived as Dharanī, during the incarnation of Paraśurāma, Sītā with Rāma and Rukmiṇī with Kṛṣṇa. According to the *Ādhyātma Purāṇa*, Sītā is inseparable from the goddesses like Lakṣmī, Pārvatī, Sarasvatī and Prabhā. In the Manohar-khaṇḍa of the *Ādhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* (12.26.39), Sītā is presented in the form of Durgā. In the *Rāma Jātaka* of Thailand, Rāvaṇa, disguised as Indra, cheats the queen of heaven. In order to take revenge, she appears in the form of Sītā on earth. In the *Palaka Palama* also similar type of story is available. In the *Adbhut Rāmāyaṇa*, Śrīmatī, the daughter of Ambarīṣa reincarnates on earth as Sītā.

Besides the theory of Sītā's incarnation on earth, several accounts are available indicating her natural birth. In one such account, she has been stated to have been born of Mandodarī as detailed below—

Rāvaṇa, while moving on the conquering spree, goes to Daṇḍakārya and demands tax from sages there, who had no riches available with them and are forced to give away drops of blood from their bodies. The blood so collected was carried in a pitcher of Laṅkā, which also contained a sanctified straw of *kuśa*-grass, placed by the sage Gṛtsamada, with the recitation of hymns. Thus the goddess stood consecrated therein. The vase was handed over to Mandodarī for safe custody as a poison. After some time Rāvaṇa went for another conquest and Mandodarī in the meantime came to know about Rāvaṇa's enjoying conjugal pleasures with other women. She, therefore, thought of ending her life and in disgust, she consumed some blood from the pitcher taking it to be poison. But instead of meeting her end, she conceived. Realising the unnatural

happening, she proceeded on pilgrimage and resorted to abortion, depositing the foetus in the ground at Kurukṣetra. After some time, Janaka ploughed the land, and discovered the child Sītā.

Indeed the different texts have spoken variously about the birth of Sītā—

- (i) **As daughter of Janaka**—*Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata*, *Harivaṃśa* and *Kūrma Purāṇa*.
- (ii) **As daughter of Earth**—*Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*.
- (iii) **As daughter of Rāvaṇa**—*Vasudevahindi*, *Uttara Purāṇa*, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, *Kāśmīri Rāmāyaṇa* (*Rāmāvatāracarita*), *Tibetan Rāmāyaṇa*.
- (iv) **Born of Lotus**—*Daśāvatāracarita*, *Torvai Rāmāyaṇa*.
- (v) **Born of Blood**—*Adbhut Rāmāyaṇa*.
- (vi) **Born of Fire**—*Bhāvārtha Rāmāyaṇa*, *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa*.
- (vii) **Daughter of Daśaratha**—*Daśaratha Jātaka*.
- (viii) **Born of Three Gems**—*Gīrdhara Rāmāyaṇa*.

18. Pṛthivī

In the Vedic literature, she has been conceived to be the mother and is more associated with Dhyau or Dhyava. Both the Sky and Pṛthivī have been considered to be the mother and father of the universe—

भूमिर्मातादितिनो जनित्रं भ्रान्तरिक्षमभिःशस्त्या नः।

द्यौरनः पिता पित्र्याच्छं भवति लोकात्॥ —*Atharvaveda*, 6.120.2

In another hymn of the *Atharvaveda*, Parjanya has been described as the husband and the earth as his wife (भूयै पर्जन्यपत्न्यै नमोऽस्तुवर्षमेदसे॥ *Ibid.*, 12.1.42). In the twelfth *mantra* of the same *Sūkta*, all the creatures are described as the sons and Parjanya as the father, besides the earth as the mother—

माता भूमि पुत्रो अहं पृथिव्या। पर्जन्य पिता स उ नः पिपतु॥

—*Ibid.*, 12.1.12

In the Sanskrit literature, the formation of the word Pṛthivī is traced to the root *Prath* (प्रथ्) which stands for expansion. In other words, Pṛthivī means, the one having vast dimensions. Yask, the composer of the *Nirukta* has also supported the above definition. In a hymn of the *Rgveda*, it is mentioned the Pṛthivī was initially expanded by Indra which also supports the theory of Yask—

स धारयत् पृथिवीं पप्रथच्च सोमस्य तामद इन्द्रश्चकार।

—*Rgveda*, II.25.2

The mother earth bears the weight of the mountains and also accommodates the forests and the forest vegetation besides producer of *oṣadhīs*. It has further been stated in the Vedic literature

that truth, *homa*, *dikṣā*, *tapas* and Brahman etc. all serve as the base of Pṛthivī. She is safe because of these elements and protects us all (*Atharvaveda*, 12.1.1).

In the post-Vedic literature, she was conceived in human form as well, but the story of her going to lord Viṣṇu, in order to rid herself of her burden because of the activities of demons, is often repeated in the epics and the Purāṇas, though initially she is said to have been rescued by the Varāha form of Viṣṇu and that is why she is sometimes termed as the spouse of Viṣṇu. In the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, which happens to be of a considerable late date, it has been mentioned that when Varāha was carrying the earth goddess in human form from the deep ocean, because of the physical contact of both of them Narakāśura was born at the spot, where Sītā was found by Janaka. The story of Narakāśura is quite popular in the literature of Java and Malaya. In their literature, he has been clearly described as the son of lord Viṣṇu.

There is a story in the Purāṇas and the *Mahābhārata*, according to which during the rule of king Pṛthu, once earth merged all the *oṣadhi* and their seeds in her body. Pṛthu felt enraged at this, which terrified Pṛthivī, who taking to the form of a cow, fled away in panic. Pṛthu followed her and she, in panic, promised the gods, *asuras*, humans, Gandharvas, Apsarās, Nāgas, *Oṣadhis*, mountains and all others to bestow them all what they desired in the form of milk. All of them individually made one of the leaders of each one of them to turn into a calf and got the desired things. Indra then turning himself to the form of a calf sucked the *soma* from the goddess earth. The Yakṣas and the Rākṣasas, on the other hand, turned Prahlāda as the calf and milked the *āsavas* from her. The Gandharvas and Apsarās milked the music and beauty out of her. The scorpions and the serpents, on the other hand, sucked the poison out of her—

कृत्वा वत्सं सुरगणा इन्द्रं सोममदुहन्।
हिरण्मयेण पात्रेण वीर्यमोजो वलं पयः॥
दैतेया दानवा वत्सं प्रह्लादमसुहर्षभम्।
विधायादुहन् क्षीरमयः पात्रे सुरासवम्॥
गन्धर्वाप्सरसोऽधुक्षन् पात्रे पद्ममये पयः।
वत्स विश्ववसु कृत्वा गन्धर्व मधु सौभगम्॥
तथाहयो वन्दशूकाः सर्पा नागाश्च तक्षकम्।
विधाय वत्सं दुदुहु बिलपात्रे विषं पयः॥

—*Bhāgavata Purāṇa*
—*Skanda Purāṇa*

During the Purāṇic period, the tales about earth resorting to the form of a cow became quite popular and she was accordingly represented in the Indian plastic art as well.

19. Rātri

Rātri too has been placed in the list of Vedic gods, who watches the activities of the universe with her eyes in the form of constellations. She is also believed to retain all the beautiful features in her body (रात्री व्यख्यदायती पुरुत्रा देव्याऽक्षभिः। विश्वा अधिश्त्रियोऽधितः॥ *Rgveda*, X.127.1). Ācārya Sāyaṇa has testified her godhood thus—गायत्रं रात्रि देवताकम्। (*Ibid.*, X.127.1). Rātri has

also been described to be the sister of Uṣā—(निरुस्वसारमस्कृतोषसं देव्यायती॥ *Ibid.*, X.127.3). She is also known as the daughter of Sūrya (उप ते गा इवाकरं वृणीष्व दुहितर्दिवः॥ *Ibid.*, X.127.8). With her light, she drives away the darkness and on her arrival, the humans move to their houses and the birds to their nests and enjoy rest. She also appears with Uṣā in several of the Vedic hymns.

20. Vak

She is known to be the goddess of the space. The Vāk Sūkta is quite famous in the *R̥gveda*. She is Vāgāmbhṛṇī, who happened to be the daughter of the seer Ambṛṇa. Vāṇī or speech is closely associated with Bṛhaspati. In the Vāk-Sūkta, the seer speaks about himself (बृहस्पते प्रथमं वाचो अग्रं। यत्त्रैरत नामधेयं दधानाः॥ *R̥gveda*, X.71.1). The goddess Vak is considered to be national and divine (अहं राष्ट्री संगमनी वसूनां चिकितुषी प्रथमा यक्षियानाम्॥ *Ibid.*, X.125.3).

21. Sarasvatī

She is known as the goddess of speech and also as a river. She is the supreme goddess of learnings, art and other fields of knowledge. In the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, she has been adored as the goddess of speech (अथ यत्स्फूजयन् वाचमिव वदन्दहति तदस्य सारस्वतं रूपम्॥ *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, 3.4). All the four Vedas are supposed to have emerged from Sarasvatī (सरस्वत्याः सर्वे वेदाः अभवन्). In the *R̥gveda*, Sarasvatī is also associated with Puṣā, Marut, Indra, Idā and Bhārati. Sāyaṇa too has testified about her godhood.

Sarasvatī has been described as the consort of Brahmā in the Purāṇas. There existed or was evolved, side by side another scheme of the origin of the cosmos from an egg in which both Puruṣa and Prakṛti, i.e., the male and the female play an equal part (*sadharmya*). The one primeval egg was split into two by its inherent self potency and these two stood as father and mother—

स्त्रीरूप धर्म करोर्धं पुरुषरूपवत्॥

—*Matsya Purāṇa*, 3.31

These became two basic forms, the male (*Puruṣa-rūpa*) and female (*Strī-rūpa*). Their composite form is Ardhanārīśvara. There can be no creation of new life without the progenitive principles. That single source is undefinable as unity called Aja in the Vedas. The Purāṇas in its own way speak of Brahmā as meditating in his heart and an autofusion is created by the goddess Sāvitṛī, out of herself as her female energy. This Sāvitṛī has many names, wherever there is a female power or energy in any form, she is an aspect of Sāvitṛī. That is why she is also called Śatarūpa in the Purāṇas (*Matsya Purāṇa*, 3.31).

In due course of time Sarasvatī was universally revered not only in Hinduism, but also in Buddhism and Jainism in spite of both these religions, having their own goddesses of learning like the Prajñāparamita in Buddhism and Vidyādevī in Jainism. Her projection as a river has been discussed separately in this work.

22. Gāyatrī

The Vedic literature has been composed in six *chandas* (metres) and Gāyatrī happens to be one of them. This has also been testified in *Amarkośa*, wherein it is clearly stated that Gāyatrī happens to be the prime *chanda* (गायत्री प्रमुखः छन्दः१). The other metres are *Uśnik*, *Anuṣṭup*, *Triṣṭubh*, *Bṛhati* and *Pañkti*. In the *R̥gvedic* literature, except the *Uśnik* and Gāyatrī metres, the remaining four are of four steps each. Gāyatrī and *Uśnik* have three steps each, as a result of this Gāyatrī metre has also been described as *Tripada*. In the Vedas, the *mantras* are formed with the counting of the letters. The half letters are not counted. In the Gāyatrī metre, there should be twenty-four letters in the groups of eight each. But in the first step of Gāyatrī *mantra*, there are only seven of them instead of eight. Therefore it is commonly believed that the step—"तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं" should be read as तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं replacing वरेण्यं with वरेण्यं, which results in the increase of a letter. Thus when one recites the hymn accordingly the eight letters could be pronounced in place of seven.

तत् स वि तु र्व रे णि यं

The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, however, describes Gāyatrī as having four steps instead of three. Accordingly भूमिरन्तरिक्षं द्यौः has been termed as the first step. 'ऋचो यजू ः पि सामानि' has been described to be second step. प्राणोऽपानो व्यानः has been described to be the third step. These are reported to be the three steps of Gāyatrī and the fourth one is पर ब्रह्म परमात्मा।

The hymn of Gāyatrī was composed in Gāyatrī-metre and is quite popular in the Hindu society. It is so closely connected with the goddess Gāyatrī that it is conceived for the adoration of the goddess, which reads as follows—

ॐ तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि।

धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात्॥

The above hymn appears in the *Yajurveda* (3.35) and has also been repeated in the *Sāmaveda* and other Vedic texts in one or the other form. At certain places the passage has been used for Gāyatrī as well as the Vedas. It is customary to add ॐ before the hymn of Gāyatrī. This ॐ has been conceived in several aspects including that of the supreme soul. The same is also called the *Praṇavā* (the sacred symbol). *Praṇava* also stands for the supreme Brahman (तस्य वाचकः प्रणवः१). Commenting over the genesis of the word *Praṇava* in the *Upaniṣads*, it has been brought out—

प्राणान्सर्वान्परमात्मनि प्रणाय यतीत्येतस्मात्प्रणवः॥

—*Atharvaśira Upaniṣad*

The above passage stands to testify that the one who gets merged in the supreme soul, is called *Praṇava*. The Vedas start also with ॐ and that is the reason for the offering ॐ before the Gāyatrī hymn—

ओङ्कारः पूर्वमुच्चार्यस्ततो वेदमधीयते।।

The formation of the word ओम् has been described in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* as the combination of अ+उ+म्, the three letters, each one of which denotes, Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva respectively. In the *Bhagavadgītā*, it has been described as the infallible Brahman (*Ekakṣara-Brahman*) (ओमित्येकाक्षरं ब्रह्म।।). According to another interpretation अ stands for the supreme soul, उ links the soul with the supreme soul, while म् stands for *jīvātmā* who happens to be the part of the supreme soul. भू भुवः स्वः represent the highest mystery and are considered to be the seeds of the Gāyatrī hymn. The words ऊँ भू भुवः स्वः should be recited before the Gāyatrī hymn. The seed-*mantras* have their own importance, and without them the recitation is considered to be of no consequence. In fact different seed-*mantras* are prescribed for different deities as for example—

- (i) ऐं is associated with Sarasvatī.
- (ii) ह्रीं क्लीं for Kālī.
- (iii) श्रीं for Lakṣmī.
- (iv) गं for Gaṇapati.

ऊँ being the form of *Praṇava* is associated with all the seed-*mantras* in the beginning and followed with the term नमः.

The god of Gāyatrī hymn is Savitā. The term Gāyatrī means the one who protects the singer or the reciter (गायत् त्रायते।।). However, the complete Gāyatrī hymn is noted hereunder—

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि।
धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात्।

This broadly means that “we meditate upon the supreme soul who pervades the earth, sky and the nether world, who leads our mind to good deeds”.

The *Ṛṣi* of Gāyatrī hymn has been stated to be Viśvāmitra. The *Gāyatrī Rahasyopaniṣad* describes Gāyatrī to have twenty-four letters—

चतुर्विंशत्यक्षरा गायत्री त्रिपदा वा चतुष्पदा।।

This passage goes on to testify that Gāyatrī hymn has twenty-four letters, whether in three steps or four steps. Not only of the hymn, but the *Ṛṣis* of each and every letter too have been prescribed. The twenty four *Ṛṣis* of the twenty-four letters of Gāyatrī are detailed below—

<i>Position of Letters</i>	<i>Name of Ṛṣi</i>
First	Vasiṣṭha
Second	Bhardvāja
Third	Garga
Fourth	Upamanyu
Fifth	Bhṛgu
Sixth	Śaṇḍilya
Seventh	Lohita
Eighth	Viṣṇu
Ninth	Satātapa
Tenth	Sanatkumāra
Eleventh	Vedavyāsa
Twelfth	Śukadeva
Thirteenth	Pārāsarya
Fourteenth	Paṇḍrakarmā
Fifteenth	Kratu
Sixteenth	Vakṣa
Seventeenth	Kaśyapa
Eighteenth	Atri
Nineteenth	Agastya
Twentieth	Uddālaka
Twenty-first	Aṅgirasa
Twenty-second	Nāmaketu
Twenty-third	Mudgala
Twenty-fourth	Aṅgirasa-Viśvāmitra.

Thus for all the twenty-four letters of Gāyatrī, there are twenty-four Ṛṣis. The glory of Gāyatrī has been brought out in the *Śrīmadbhāgavata Purāṇa*, wherein Gāyatrī has been equated with Puruṣa-Sūkta, *Vedatrayī* etc. As many as sixteen articles have been equated in the said Purāṇas—

वेदादि वेदमाता च पौरुषं सूक्तमेव च।
त्रयी भागवतं चैव द्वादशाक्षरमेव च॥

द्वादशात्मा प्रयागश्च कालः संवत्सरात्मकः।
 ब्राह्मणाग्निहोत्रं च सुरभि द्वादशी तथा॥
 तुलसी च वसन्तश्च पुरषोत्तम एव च।
 ऐतेषां तत्त्वतः प्राज्ञैर्न पृथग्भाव इष्यते॥

—*Māhātmya*, 3.34-36

(The Vedas, Vedamātā-Gāyātrī, *Puruṣa-Sūkta*, Vedatrayī, *Bhāgavata*, *Dvādasākṣara*—
 ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय।, Sūrya, Prayāga, Saṁvatasara, Kāla, Brāhmaṇa, Yajña,
 Surabhi, Twelfth day of the moon, Tulasī—Holy basil, spring season, and lord
 Puruṣottama, are considered by the wise one as equals.)

In this connection it may also be brought out that the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* contains as many as twenty-four thousand verses and in case the first letter of the verse after a thousand verses, is extracted, it would form the hymn of Gāyātrī. In the comparatively later text Gāyātrī was adored in various forms. The commonly known form of the goddess happens to be of five faces and ten arms. An eighteenth century painting from Mysore, currently preserved in the National Museum, depicts the five headed and ten armed goddess standing over a pedestal under a *torāṇa*, holding different attributes in all the ten hands (Refer to Pl. 43). Sarasvatī holding a *viṇā* in one of the four arms appears to her left while another female stands with folded hands to her right. A *chatra* appears at the top of the *torāṇa*. She is clad in a *saree* like garment, and wears a long garland of flowers and beaded necklace, besides other ornaments.

7

The Composite or the Dual Gods

The Vedic religion and culture are dominated by the sacrifices and the powerful gods who are invoked by the devotees from time to time for some reason or the other and their invocation is translated into reality by making offerings in the fire altars. This is the reason why the god Agni has been termed to be the carrier of the gods because the offerings made in the fire sacrifice are supposed to be carried by the god of fire to the respective god, who is invoked by the devotee. But at times there might arise a situation in which more than one god had to be invoked for a variety of purposes and as such the concept of the dual gods or composite character of the gods came into vogue. But in view of the fact that at that early stage no proper images were made, the iconography of these gods, much less of the composite forms could be available. It may be recalled here that during the medieval times the composite forms of the Brāhmaṇical and the Buddhist deities were very much in vogue and the *Śilpaśāstras* went to the extent of defining even their iconographical forms, which were followed by the sculptors quite faithfully. But for the Vedic composite forms, no such details are available. The account that follows deals with the composite or the dual gods of the Vedic period strictly in the Vedic background, because, their following in these forms did not travel to the later times.

1. Agni-Marut

In the Vedic gods, Agni-Marut is known as the dual god in the family of the Vedic gods. The seventh Sūkta of the fifth Maṇḍala of the *R̥gveda* is dedicated to this god and he is invoked for the sake of protection. He is further considered to be the god of the heaven ruling the upper, middle and the lower regions—

यदुत्तसे मरुतो मध्यमे वा दद्वावमेसुभगासोदिविष्ट।
अतो नो रुद्रा उत वान्वस्याग्ने चित्ताद्भविषोयद्यज्ञाम्॥

—*R̥gveda*, V.60.6

“O fortunate Maruts, you have established yourself in the upper, middle and the lower regions of the space. For our protection, you descend from all the three regions. O lord of fire, you accept our offerings.”

The combination of the god of fire and the god Maruts, has been commented upon by Br̥haddevatā as follows—

अग्ने मरुद्भिरित्थिस्त्वां मरुद्भिसहसंस्तौ॥

—*Br̥haddevatā*, 5.48

2. Agni-Varuṇa

Some of the hymns of the *R̥gveda* speak of the dual god Agni-Varuṇa. The god Agni is invoked to pacify the anger of Varuṇa and to protect the people—

त्वं नो अग्नेवरुणस्य विद्वान्देवस्य हेळोऽवया सिसीष्ठाः।
यजिष्ठो वह्नितपः शोशुचानो विश्वा द्वेषांसि प्रभुमुग्धयस्मत्॥

—*Rgveda*, IV.1.4

“O god Agni, you are illustrious, adorable, everywhere and carry the offerings made in fire to the gods. You please the god Varuṇa for our sake and also destroy all our misfortunes.”

In other Sūktas of the *Rgveda*, both Agni and Varuṇa are adored as the two separate gods, but in some Sūktas of the fourth Maṇḍala (IV.1.2-5) of the *Rgveda*, both Agni and Varuṇa are adored as the alternate gods and have been conceived as the dual gods. Their godhood has been accepted by Sāyaṇa, in the following passage—

परिभाषयाग्निर्देवता द्वितीयाद्यातत्रो वरुण देवत्या वा॥

—*Rgveda*, IV.1 (Sāyaṇa's Commentary)

The godhood of both of them is also mentioned in the Bṛhaddevatā as under—

तिसृष्वग्निर्निपातथाक्। वरुणेनाधिसस्तैति आहुरुग्ये निपातिनम्॥

—(4.1.28)

3. Agnindra

Agnindra, is one of the composite god of the Vedic literature, who stands for Agni and Indra combined. Both of them are also called as twin brothers, who are sons of the same father. In the *Rgveda*, they have been mentioned as follows—

प्र नु वोचा सुतेषु वांवीर्याश्यानि चक्रधुः।
हतासो व पितरो देवशत्रव इन्द्राग्नी जीवथो युवम्॥

—*Rgveda*, 6.59.1

(O god Indrāgni, you are immortal; you are the saviour. You have destroyed the demons, who were jealous of the gods by your valour. Preparing Soma, you recite its glory.)

In fact the entire Sūkta-59 (verses 1-10) is dedicated to this composite deity and has been described as समानो वां जनिता भ्रातरा यवं यमाविहेहमातरा (*Rgveda*, VI.59.2) or the twins who are born of Aditi, by one and the same father. It is also stated therein that—

- (i) Like the horse who grazes the grass with pleasure, the twin gods get delight by consuming the *soma*.
- (ii) Indrāgni does not accept *soma* offered by disgraceful people and those who are short of affection.
- (iii) He has been described as the holder of a bow and is always ready to protect the cows.
- (iv) The god is invoked for the protection of people from attack of wicked enemies.

4. Indrāgni

The godhood of Indrāgni is available in all the four Vedas. This composite god is the foremost of the gods who are invoked for the drinking of *soma* juice. He approaches the place of sacrifice mounted over a chariot—

य इन्द्राग्निं चित्रतमोरथो वामभि विश्वानि भुवनानि चष्टे।

—*Rgveda*, I.108.1

The prime function of this composite god is to destroy the enemies as also the places of their dwellings. He protects the noble people and attacks the enemies with the weapons—आ भरतं वज्रबाहु अस्मां इन्द्राग्नी अवतं शचीभिः। (*Rgveda*, I.109.7). The *Rgveda* further testifies to the destruction of ninety-one fortresses of a demon named Dasa, by Indrāgni इन्द्राग्नी नवति पुरो दास पत्नी रधूनुतम्। (*Rgveda*, III.12.6). In the *Rgveda* offerings in the sacrifice in favour of Indrāgni have been made twenty-four times and he has been invoked several times in the *Rgveda* alongwith other gods.

In the *Yajurveda* too, Indrāgni has been invoked for the drinking of *soma* in the sacrifice.

उभावामिन्द्राग्नी आहुवध्या उभा राघसः सह मादयध्वै।

—*Yajurveda*, III.13

(O Indrāgni, we invoke both of you in the sacrifice and we offer you riches in the form of *haviṣya*).

In the *Sāmaveda*, the composite god is conceived who is invoked in the sacrifice and he showers his grace (over those who invoke him)—

इन्द्राग्नीं कविच्छदा यज्ञस्य जूत्था वृणे।

ता सोमस्येह तृप्यताम्।

—*Sāmaveda*, 671

In the *Atharvaveda*, Indrāgni is invoked with other gods, for the protection from the deadly exercises of the enemy undertaken by him stealthily—

अपन्यधुः पौरुषेयं वधं यमिन्द्राग्नीधाता, सविता बृहस्पति।

—*Atharvaveda*, XI.20.1

5. Agnisoma

This composite form of god represents the combination of Agni and Soma. In the *Rgveda*, this composite form stands for the giver of light, and at some places he is described as the one having the capacity to free the flow of water. He has also been conceived as the mover of the constellations in the sky. In fact an entire Sūkta-93 of first Maṇḍala of the *Rgveda* is dedicated to this composite god. He is conceived as the one who grants progeny and the one who makes people enjoy full life with vigour—

अग्निषोमा य आहुतिं यो वांदाशर्द्धविष्कृतिम्।

स प्रजयासुवीर्यं विश्वमायुर्व्यश्नवत्॥

—*Rgveda*, 1.93.3

(O god Agniṣoma, whosoever performs the *yajña* making offerings to you, enjoys full life with all the vigour.)

In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, both of them have been eulogised as two brothers—(अग्निषोमौ भ्रातरावब्रवीत् *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, XI.1.6.19). The same text also relates Agni with Sūrya and Soma with the moon (सूर्य एवाग्नेयक्षन्द्रमाः सौम्यः। *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 1.6.3.24). In the *R̥gveda* as well as the *Atharvaveda* the grace of the god has been sought for getting riches, gold, cattle, people and grandeur, at several places. In the *Atharvaveda*, he has been described as the one who subjugates the terrible demons (XVIII.2).

6. Agni-Viṣṇu

Apparently, this a composite god—a combination of Agni and Viṣṇu, who does not find place in the *R̥gveda*, nor is there any mention of the offerings made to him at the sacrifice. In the *Atharvaveda*, however, this god is found mentioned twice in a single Sūkta, where he has been reverentially eulogised, saying that the glory of both the (twin) aspects of the god is quite enormous. He has been conceived as the one who consumes the *ājya* and *sānayya-ghee* of the sacrifice. He also is conceived to shower seven types of gems in the houses. The twin deity is supposed to be quite illustrious and is dear to all. He feels elevated after having been eulogised by the people.

अग्नाविष्णूमहि तद्वांमहित्वं पाथो घृतस्यगुह्यस्य नाम।
दमे दमे सप्तरत्नादधानौ प्रति वां जिह्वा घृतमा चरण्यात्॥

—*Atharvaveda*, VII.29.1

(O lord Agni-Viṣṇu, you stay at one place and enjoy great glory. Both the gods consume the sacrifice *ghee*. You shower gems of seven types in the houses of your devotees. Both of you possess divine tongues which consume the *ghee* of the sacrifice.)

The verse VII.29.2 of the *Atharvaveda* too expresses similarly about the composite deity.

7. Agni-Sūrya-Anila

A hymn in the *R̥gveda* adores the three gods Agni, Sūrya and Anila in a composite form and the relevant passage is brought out as under—

शमग्निरग्निभिः करच्छं नस्तपतु सूर्यः
शं वातो वात्वरया अपस्त्रियः॥

—*R̥gveda*, VIII.18.9

(The god of fire with his flames, the Sun with his bright sunrays and the Wind-god with his force, should remove all the ailments or the enemies of our body.)

All these three gods pervade the earth, the sky as well as the universe. These three gods are collectively adored even in the *Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa*—

अग्निराजिदोहं वायुराजिदोहमसावदिव्य आजि दोहम्॥

—*Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa*, 2.25.6

The author of the *Bṛhaddevatā* has also stated about the divinity of these three gods in a composite form as under—

स्तुताः शमितिपच्छस्तु अग्निसूर्यानलःस्त्रयः। —*Bṛhaddevatā*, 6.50

8. Keśin (Agni-Sūrya and Vāyu)

The element with three rays has been defined as Keśin. These three rays are believed to be that of fire, the sun and the wind—

त्रयः केशिन ऋतुथा वि चक्षते संवत्सरे वपत एक एषाम्॥
—*Rgveda*, I.164.44

This means that the elements with rays appear according to the seasons. The sun being one of them pervades the universe with his rays; while the god of fire provides the heat with his flames, but the rays of the Wind-god though exist do not become visible usually. Therefore, their godhood has been duly accepted by the Vedic seers.

9. Indra-Aśva

Indra happens to be the prime god of the *Rgveda*, but the steed of Indra's chariot are also sometimes adored together with Indra, in some of the Vedic hymns like gods or the dual gods. As for example—

कनीनकेव विद्रधे नवे द्रुपदे अर्भके। वधू यामेष शोभेते।
—*Rgveda*, IV.32.23

“O Indra, your steeds of brown complexion move like the hard wooden puppets (and are well controlled).”

The same idea is propounded in the next hymn (IV.32.24). These hymns try to bring home the point that like a beautifully painted puppet made of the piece of wood steals the show, similarly, the beautiful steeds of Indra grace the chariot of Indra. These steeds are also invoked for the welfare of the one who moves on foot or by the bullock cart.

Sāyaṇa too has testified the godhood of India's steed as under—

अन्ये कनीनकेवइत्यादिके द्वेइन्द्रस्यास्य देवताके तथा चानुकान्तम्—आ तु नक्षातु
विशतिन्त्याभ्यामिन्द्राक्षौ स्तुतौ इति॥

—V.4.32 (Sāyaṇa's Commentary)

10. Indrāpūṣaṇa

This composite form of god appears in the *Rgveda* rather indirectly, another similar name Indrapūṣā also occurs. Only one *mantra* is dedicated to this god, wherein he has been invoked for protection (VII.53). In the *Atharvaveda*, he is invoked together with other gods like Agni, Aditi, Apanapata, Marudgaṇa, Saptasindhu, the sky and Viṣṇu for protection—

पातं न इन्द्रापूषणादितिपान्तु मरुतः।

अपां नपात् सिन्धवः सप्तपातनपातुनो विष्णुरुत द्यौः।

—*Atharvaveda*, VI.3.1

In the *Atharvaveda* (Nineteenth Kāṇḍa) in the battle of Vājasāti, he has been invoked for the removal of the ailments as well as the dangers. The god too has been recognised by the author of *Bṛhaddevatā* besides Śaunaka—

छागस्य कीर्तनं चात्र इन्द्रापूष्णोसह स्तति।

—431

11. Indra-Puṣān

This god is also included in the composite forms in the *R̥gveda*. In *R̥gveda* (VI.57.1), this composite god has been invoked for obtaining cereals, for welfare and has been termed as quite friendly. The people offer prayers to him—

इन्द्रा नु पूषणा वयं सख्याय स्वस्तये। हुवेम वाजसातये।

—*R̥gveda*, VI.57.1

It is further conceived that one can achieve complete protection under the strong branch of the tree like Indra-Puṣā (*R̥gveda*, VI.57.5). In the *Bṛhaddevatā* too, Indra-Puṣān has been recognised as the god of considerable importance (इन्द्रापूषणो सहस्तुतिः, 431). Besides Sāyaṇa too has described the god (इन्द्रापूषणौ देवौ नु अद्य च वयं स्वस्तये—*R̥gveda*, VI.57.1, Sāyaṇa's Commentary). Sāyaṇa, however, conceives the deity as having two separate entities, combined into one.

12. Indra-Parvata

In the family of the Vedic gods, a dual deity called Indra-Parvata, a combination of the two gods is also found. Only a few hymns are dedicated to the dual gods, in which they have been conceived as the destroyer of the enemies. They are invoked for the destruction of the enemies and for the protection of self.

युवं तमिन्द्रापर्वता पुरोयुधा यो नः पृतन्यादप

तन्तमिद्धतं वज्रेण तन्तमिद्धतम्।

दूरे चत्तायच्छन्तसद्रहनं यदिनक्षत्॥

अस्माकं शत्रुन्यरि शू विश्वतो दयी दर्शीष्ट विश्वतः॥

—*R̥gveda*, 1.132.6

(Moving forward in the battlefield, both Indra and Parvata display their prowess. By waging the war they destroy every one of their enemy with the attack of the terrific *vajra*. You better protect us after we are surrounded by the enemy from all sides. O god! you pervade the earth, the sky and the heaven, by your grace, let us prosper, with enormous riches and valorous sons.)

13. Indra-Vāyu

Indra-Vāyu too comes into the category of composite gods. This composite god has been invoked in the *Rgveda* for the drinking of *soma*—

उमा देवादिविस्पृशेन्द्र वायु हवामहे। अस्य सोमस्य पीतये।

—*Rgveda*, I.23.2

(Whose glory is spread upto the divine heaven, such Indra and Vāyu are invoked for drinking of *soma*.)

In reality a part of Sūkta-23 of the first Maṇḍala of the *Rgveda* is devoted to this composite god, who is also conceived therein as—

- (i) The one who is invoked to drink the *soma* mixed with milk.
- (ii) Indra is described to possess the speed of the mind, a thousand eyes, lord of wisdom and the one who is invoked by the learned people for their protection.

In the *Atharvaveda*, this god is eulogised in a single verse inviting him to participate in the sacrifice. By his arrival the people not only get well disposed towards those who offer prayers, but also intend to perform charity—

इन्द्रवायु उभाविह सुहवेह हवामहे। यथा सर्व इज्जनः संगत्या सुमना

असहानकामहा नो भुवतं।

—*Atharvaveda*, III.20.6

14. Indra-Varuṇa

Indra and Varuṇa are the two powerful gods of the Vedic period and their coming together in a composite form is quite important inasmuch as both of them are invoked possibly in the case of extreme danger and had been the strong protectors of the humans. Eight complete Sūktas of the *Rgveda* are devoted to the twin gods, a few of which are quoted below as an illustration—

इन्द्रावरुणोरहं सम्राजोरव आ वृणे।

ता नो मूलात ईदृशे।।

अनुकामं तर्पयेथामिन्द्रावरुण राय आ।

ता वां वेदिष्ठमीमहे।।

—*Rgveda*, 1.17.1,3

(We seek our protection from the glorious gods like Indra and Varuṇa. Both of them should bestow their grace on us which could grant us the relief. O Indra and Varuṇa, you better please us by bestowing the riches according to our desires, we offer prayers reaching quite close to you.)

Besides the above the gods are also invoked for the purity of actions, thought and behaviour seeking the best of intelligence and enable the people to be quite charitable. They are also conceived to bestow all the riches and other comforts of life.

15. Indra-Uṣā

Though Indra had been the most powerful god of the Vedic literature and has earned adoration in many of the Sūktas therein but he has also been adored sometimes with Uṣās—In some of the hymns, the conflict between Indra and Uṣā has also been projected—

दिवश्चिद्धा दुहितरं महान्महीयमानम्।

उषा समिन्द्र सं पिणक्॥

अपोषा अनसः सरत्संष्टिदह विभ्युषी।

नियत्सी शिश्नयद्वृषा॥

—*Rgveda*, IV.31.9-10

(O lord Indra, you are great. You destroy the enemy army in the same way as Uṣās is destroyed by the sun. When the valorous lord Indra shattered the chariot of Uṣās, she was terrified and stood aside getting down from the broken chariot.)

16. Indra-Viṣṇu

The twin gods of Indra and Viṣṇu enjoy an important place in the list of the Vedic deities. In the three *Ṛcas* of the first Maṇḍala (Sūkta-155), both the gods are adored in a combined form. Both the gods have been termed as those who increase the flames of fire. The people who perform the *soma-yajña*, contribute to the increase in the glory of Indra and Viṣṇu—

त्वेषामित्था समरणं शिमीनतोरिन्द्राविष्णु सुतया वायुरुष्यति।

या मर्त्याय प्रतिधीयमान मित्कृशानोरस्तुरसनामुरुष्यथः॥

—*Rgveda*, I.155.2

(O gods Indra and Viṣṇu, both of you are the destroyer of the enemies like the powerful flames of the fire, which go on spreading again and again. Those who perform the *soma* sacrifice contribute to the increase in the glory of your flames.)

17. Soma-Rudra

The dual gods have been invoked in the Sūkta-74 of the sixth Maṇḍala of the *Rgveda*. They have been described to be quite competent, who always help in the completion of the sacrifices and establish seven metals (*dhātu*) in every house and body besides bestowing welfare. They also provide pleasure to the offsprings and the animals—

सोमरुद्रा धारयेथामसुर्यप्रवामिष्टयोऽरमश्नुवन्तु।

दमे दमे सप्त रत्ना दधाना शं नो भूतं द्विपदे शं चतुष्पदे।

—*Rgveda*, VI.74.1

Both of them are also invoked for the removal of the diseases from homes, poverty and for the bestowing of the grains. They are also conceived to remove ailments from the body with the application of medicines.

18. Dyāvā-Prthivī

In the family of the Vedic deities, the Sky and the Earth have also been included—

मही द्यौः पृथिवी च न इमं यज्ञं मिमिक्षताम्।
पिपृतां नो भरीमभिः॥
तयोरिदधृतवत्ययो विप्रा रिहन्ति।
गन्धर्वस्य ध्रुवे पदे॥

—*Rgveda*, I.22.13-14

(The expanded earth, and the sky should help us complete the sacrifice with their respective efforts. They should both feed us with the cereals for our consumption. In the place of Dhruva in the region of Gandharvaloka, lying in between the sky and the earth, the learned men can achieve the truth with their efforts like the *ghee* is extracted out of the milk.)

Both the earth and the sky have been adored in six Sūktas of the *Rgveda* and the sky has not been adored even in a single Sūkta exclusively. On the other hand, the earth too has been adored only in three Sūktas of the *Rgveda*.

19. Ṛbhu-Gaṇas

In the *Rgveda*, there is a set of gods, whose personality could never be developed fully in true sense of the term. Ṛbhu happens to be one of them. These Ṛbhhus have been adored in eleven Sūktas of the *Rgveda* and their names have been mentioned nearly a hundred times. Besides they are also eulogised in nearly three hundred more names, combined with the other names of Ṛbhukṣa, Vājā and Vibhṽn. These three names are also frequently mentioned—

तद्धो वाजा ऋभवः सुप्रवाचन देवेषु विभवो अभवन्महितम्॥

—*Rgveda*, IV.36.3

Sometimes these elements are seen quite dimly because Ṛbhu appear with Ṛbhus and Vibhva appears with Vibhus—

ऋभु ऋभुभिरभि वः स्याम विभवो विभुभिः शवासि॥

—*Rgveda*, VII.48.2

Ṛbhus are also stated to be closely associated with Indra. Sometimes they are equated even with Indra—

ऋभूर् इन्द्रः शवसा नवीवान्॥

—*Rgveda*, I.110.7

These Ṛbhus are also stated to be associated with Āditya, Savita, mountains and the streams.

20. Dyaus and Prthivī

The general opinion respecting Dyaus (Heaven) and Prthivī (Earth) is that they are amongst the most ancient of the Aryan deities—hence they are spoken of in the hymns of the *Rgveda*

as the parents of the other gods. They are described as "great, wise, and energetic", those who "promote righteousness, and lavish gifts upon their worshippers." And in another place they are said to have "made all creatures", and through their favour "immortality is conferred upon their offspring." Not only are they the creators, but also the preservers of all creatures; and are beneficent and kind to all. In other passages Heaven and Earth are said to have been formed by Indra, who is declared to transcend them in greatness, whom they follow "as a chariot follows the horse." They are described as bowing down before him; as trembling with fear on account of him; and as being subject to his control. Again they are said to have been formed by Soma; and in other verses other deities are said to have made them. This confusion of thought respecting the origin of these gods led very naturally to the question being asked in other hymns, "how have they been produced? Who of the sages knows?"

There seems to be considerable ground for the opinion that Indra gradually superseded Dyaus in the worship of the Hindus soon after their settlement in India. As the praises of the newer gods were sung, the old one was forgotten; and in present day, whilst Dyaus is almost unknown, Indra is worshipped, though in the Vedas both are called the god of Heaven. The following statement of Professor Benfey gives a natural explanation of this—

"It may be distinctly shown that Indra took the place of the god of Heaven, who, in the Vedas, is invoked in the vocative as Dyauspitar (Heaven-father). This is proved by the fact that this phrase is exactly reflected in the Latin Jupiter, and the Greek Zeus-pater as a religious formula, fixed, like many others, before the separation of the languages. When the Sanskrit people left the common country (where for them, as well as for other kindred tribes, the brilliant radiance of heaven appeared to them in consequence of the climate there prevailing, as the holiest thing) and settled in sultry India (where the glow of the heavens is destructive, and only its rain operates beneficially), this aspect of the Deity must have appeared the most adorable, so that the epithet Pluvius, in a certain sense, absorbed all the other characteristics of Dyauspitar. It is found its expression in the name Indra, in which we unhesitatingly recognise a word (which arose in some local dialect, and was then diffused with the spread of the worship) standing for *Sind-dr*, which again was derived from Syand, 'to drop'. The conceptions which had been attached to Dyaus were then transferred to Indra."

The opinion that Indra has taken the place of Dyaus is now pretty generally believed, and certainly the above explanation appears to be very natural.

Of Pṛthivī we hear again. The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* gives the following account of her birth—There was a king name Veṇa, notorious for his wickedness and neglect of religious duties. When the Ṛṣis of that age could bear with his impiety no longer, they slew him. But now a worse evil happened; anarchy prevailed, and they felt that a bad king was better than none at all. Upon this they rubbed the thigh of Veṇa, and there came forth a black dwarf, like a negro in appearance. Immediately after his birth this dwarf asked, "What am I to do?" He is told,

'*Niśīda*' (sit down) and from this his descendants are called '*Nisidis*' unto this day. The right arm was then rubbed, and from it there came a beautiful shining prince, who was named *Pr̥thu*, and reigned in the place of his father. Now during his reign there was a famine. Earth would not yield her fruits, and great distress prevailed. *Pr̥thu* said, "I will slay the Earth and make her yield her fruits." Terrified at this threat, the Earth assumed the form of a cow, and was pursued by *Pr̥thu* through space, even to the heaven of *Brahmā*. At length, weary with the chase she turned to *Pr̥thu* and said, "Know you not the sin of killing a female that you thus try to slay me?" The king replied that, "when the happiness of many is secured by the destruction of one malignant being, the death of that being is an act of virtue." "But", said the Earth, "If, in order to promote the welfare of your subjects, you put an end to me, whence best of monarchs, will emerge and derive their support?" Overcome at length, the Earth declared that all vegetable products were old, and destroyed by her, but that with the king's command she would restore them "as developed from her milk." "Do you therefore, for the benefit of mankind, give me that calf by which I may be able to secrete milk. Make also all places level, so that I may cause my milk, the seed of all vegetation, to flow everywhere around".

Pr̥thu acted upon this advice of the Earth. "Before his time there was no cultivation, no pasture, no agriculture, no highway for merchants, all these things (or all civilization) originated in the reign of *Pr̥thu*. Where the ground was made level, the kind induced his subjects to take up their abode. He, therefore, having made *Svayambhuva* *Manu* the calf, milked the Earth, and received the milk into his own hand, for the benefit of mankind. Thence proceeded all kinds of corn and vegetables upon which people now subsist. By granting life to the Earth, *Pr̥thu* was as her father, and she thence derived the patronymic appellation *Pr̥thivī*."

In a note Professor Wilson adds, the commentator observes that "by the 'calf', or *Manu* in that character is typified the promoter of the multiplication of progeny," *Manu*, as will be seen in the account of the creation, being regarded by some of the *Purāṇas* as the first parent of mankind. This legend, with considerable variation, is found in most of the *Purāṇas*; *Soma*, *Indra*, *Yama* and others taking the place of *Manu* as the calf; whilst *Pr̥thu*'s place as the milker is taken by the *Ṛṣis*, *Mitra*, etc. In the same note Professor Wilson says—"These are all probably subsequent modifications of the original simple allegory, which typified the earth as a cow, who yielded to every class of beings the milk that they desired, or the object of their wishes."

It should be noticed that, later on in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, *Pr̥thivī* is said to have sprung from the foot of *Viṣṇu*.

21. Agni

The god is called *Agni*, because he was born first of all—

स यदस्यसर्वस्याप्रमुसृजत तस्मादग्निं नैतमग्निस्त्वाच हते परोऽक्षम॥

—*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 6.1.1.11

Of all the gods on earth, *Agni* happens to be the foremost. *Agni* also stands next to *Indra* in all the Vedic gods as well. In the *Ṛgveda* itself, more than two hundred hymns are devoted to him. He has been eulogised in the *Ṛgveda* with the following epithets—

- (i) Ghr̥ta-pr̥ṣṭha, (IV.6.3).
- (ii) Ghr̥ta-pratika, (III.1.18).
- (iii) Sujihva, (I.14.7).
- (iv) Ghr̥ta-keśa, (VIII.60.2).
- (v) Harikeśa, (III.2.13)
- (vi) Saptajihvā, (III.6.2).
- (vii) Hiranyadanta, (V.2.3)

At times, he is equated with the Sun in the sky he is called as the gem of the gods—शिरोमणि-सप्तरश्मि। (*R̥gveda*, I.146.1). He is also stated to have been born of two mothers, because he was created by rubbing two sticks of wood—

द्विमाताशयुः कतिधा चिदायवे॥

—*R̥gveda*, I.32.2

He is also conceived to be the father of the gods because he feeds them carrying the offerings made in the fire altar for them—भुवो देवानां पितृ पुत्रं सन्। (*R̥gveda*, I.61.1). Besides the above, he is also known in the Vedic literature by the epithets of Viśvadeva, Kavi, Kavikratu, Jātaveda, Vaiśvānara, Mātariśva, etc.

Agni is the most important of the terrestrial gods, happens to be the god of fire, who is next to Indra. Of all the Vedic gods, he is frequently invoked. One-fifth of the hymns of the *R̥gveda* are devoted to him. It is only natural that the personification of the sacrificial fire, the centre of the Vedic rituals should engross the thoughts of the poets to such an extent. Agni is also the ordinary name of fire and as such the anthropomorphism for the god could not develop much except with the various types of the sacrificial fire. However, in the post-Vedic period the iconographical features of the god were fully developed, in which, he was not only given the definite human form with beard and moustaches but also a ram as his vehicle. Agni is borne on a brilliant car drawn by two or more steeds or sheep. Except the sacrificial activities, nothing much is said about the deeds of Agni. It is otherwise his various births, and abodes that occupy the thoughts of the Vedic seers. Agni is usually called the son of Dyaus and Pṛthivī, sometimes also the offspring of Tvaṣṭā and the waters. But owing to the daily production of Agni from the two fire sticks, they too are at times called his parents. He is then a new-born infant, also called the “son of the strength” because of the powerful friction, required to kindle the flames. He wakes at Dawn, for the fire is lit every morning. He is thus the youngest of the gods, but he is also old, having conducted the first sacrifices. As not only terrestrial, but spring from the serial waters and having been brought from the heaven, Agni is often spoken of as having a true character. The threefold Agni is the earliest Indian trinity, probably the prototype not only of the later *R̥gveda* triad of sun, wind, fire connected with three divisions of the universe but also of the triad Sun, Indra, fire, which though not *R̥gvedic*, is still quite ancient. There may be a historical connection between this triad and the conception of the later Hindu trinity of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva.

As the deity most intimately associated with the everyday life of man, Agni is spoken as an immortal who has taken up his abode in mortals in human dwellings and is constantly called a guest and lord of the house. Being the conductor of the sacrifice as well as the one who summons the gods, he is also described as the messenger who frequently moves between the heaven and earth. Agni is most characteristically called a priest usually by generic terms *Ṛtvij* and *Vipra*; or specifically the domestic priest. He is in fact the great priest among the Vedic gods as Indra is the great warrior. Agni is a great benefactor too of his worshippers, whose enemies he consumes. The benefits he confers are chiefly domestic welfare, and general prosperity, while those which Indra grants are mostly rewards of victory. Agni is also spoken of in the *Ṛgveda* as the slayer of the goblins and possibly portrays the earliest stage of the cult of fire as warding off the attack of the spirits.

22. Soma

Since the *Soma* sacrifice forms by the side of the fire worship, the other main feature of the ritual of the *Ṛgveda* is the personification of the juice of the *Soma* plant is one of the most prominent deities. Judged by the number of hymns addressed to him, *Soma* is third in importance among the Vedic gods, coming next to Agni in this point of view. Since the plant and the juice are constantly before the eye of the priest as he sings the praises of the god, the personification is in vogue. The imagination of the poet dwells chiefly on the processes of striving and pressing which it always with chaotic imagery and mystical fancies of almost infinite variety. As the most important of the herbs, *Soma* is spoken of as the lord of plants or as their king being also designated as the "lord of forest". There are several references to *Soma* growing up on mountains. Heaven is, however, regarded as the tree and the original house and the myth of his having been brought down on earth by an eagle, is often alluded to. The mental stimulation produced by the drinking of *Soma* is expressed by one of the poets of the *Ṛgveda* (605-606), with the words, "We have drunk *Soma*. We have become immortal, we have entered into light, we have known the gods. Its exhilarating power is, however, dwelt upon chiefly in connection with Indra, whom it inspires in his mighty conflicts with the serial demons. *Soma* thus came to be regarded as a divine drink, which bestowed immortality on the gods being called *amṛta*. Thus the god *Soma* places his worshippers in the imperishable world of eternal light.

Various accounts are given of the origin of Agni. He is said to be a son of Dyaus and *Ṛṥthivī*; he is called the son of *Brahmā*, and is then named *Abhimani*; and he is reckoned amongst the children of *Kaśyapa* and *Aditi*, and hence one of the *Ādityas*.

In a celebrated hymn of the *Ṛgveda*, attributed to *Vasiṣṭha*, Indra and the other gods are called upon to destroy the *Kravyads* (the flesh-eaters), or *Rākṣasas*, enemies of the gods. Agni himself is a *Kravyad*, and as such takes an entirely different character. He is represented under form as hideous as the beings he, in common with the other gods, is called upon to devour. He sharpens his two iron tusks, puts his enemies into his mouth, and devours them. He heats the edges of his shafts, and sends them into the hearts of the *Rākṣasas*.

Agni is described as an immortal who has taken up his abode with mortals as their guest. He is the domestic priest who rises before the dawn, and who concentrates in his own person and exercises in a higher sense all the various sacrificial offices which the Indian ritual assigns to a number of different human functionaries. He is a sage, the divinest among the sages, intimately acquainted with all the forms of worship; the wise director, the successful accomplisher, and the protector of all ceremonies, who enables men to serve the gods in a correct and acceptable manner, in cases where they could not do this with their own unaided skill. He is a swift messenger, moving between heaven and earth, commissioned both by gods and men to maintain their mutual communication, to announce to the immortals the hymns, and to convey to them the oblations of their worshipper; or to bring them (the immortals) down from the sky to the place of sacrifice. He accompanies the gods when they visit the earth, and shares in the reverence and adoration which they receive. He makes the oblations fragrant; without him the gods experience no satisfaction.

Agni is the lord, protector, king of men. He is the lord of the house, dwelling in every abode. He is a guest in every home; he despises no man, he lives in every family. He is therefore considered as a mediator between gods and men, and as a witness of their actions; hence to the present day he is worshipped, and his blessing sought on all solemn occasions, as at marriage, death, etc. In these old hymns Agni is spoken of as dwelling in the two pieces of wood, which being rubbed together produce fire; and it is noticed as a remarkable thing that a living being should spring out of dry (dead) wood. Strange to say, says the poet, the child, as soon as born, begins with unnatural veracity to consume his parents. Wonderful is his growth, seeing that he is born of a mother who cannot nourish him, but he is nourished by the oblations of clarified butter which are poured into his mouth, and which he consumes.

The highest divine functions are ascribed to Agni. Although in some places he is spoken of as the son of heaven and earth, in others he is said to have stretched them out; to have formed them, and all that flies or walks, or stands or moves. He formed the sun, and adorned the heaven with stars. Men tremble at his mighty deeds and his ordinances cannot be resisted. Earth, heaven and all things obey his commands. All the gods fear, and do homage to him. He knows the secrets of mortals, and hears the invocation that are addressed to him.

The worshippers of Agni prosper, are wealthy, and live long. He watches with a thousand eyes over the man who brings him food, and nourishes him with oblations. No mortal enemy can by any wondrous power gain the mastery over him who sacrifices to this god. He also confers and is the guardian of immortality. In a funeral hymn, Agni is asked to warm with his heat the unborn (immortal) part of the deceased, and in his auspicious form to carry it to the world of the righteous. He carries men across calamities, as a ship over the sea. He commands all the riches in earth and heaven; hence he is invoked for riches; food, deliverance, and in fact all temporal good. He is also prayed to as the forgiver of sins that may have been committed through folly. All gods are said to be comprehended in him; he surrounds them as the circumference of a wheel does the spokes.

In the *Mahābhārata*, Agni is represented as having exhausted his vigour by devouring too many oblations, and desiring to consume the whole Khāṇḍava forest, as a means of recruiting

his strength. He was (at first) prevented from doing this by Indra; but having obtained the assistance of Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, he baffled Indra, and accomplished his object.

According to the *Rāmāyaṇa*, in order to assist Viṣṇu when incarnate as Rāma, Agni became the father of Nīla by a monkey mother; and according to the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, he married Svāhā, by whom he had three sons—Pāvaka, Pavamana and Suci.

In the later writings he is described as a son of Āṅgīrasa, king of the Pitṛs (father of mankind), and the authorship of several hymns is ascribed to him. In art he is represented as a red man, having three legs and seven arms, dark eyes, eye-brows and hair. He rides on a ram, wears a *yajñopavīta* (Brāhmaṇical thread), and a garland of fruit. Flames of fire issue from his mouth, and seven streams of glory radiate from his body.

8

Aṣṭa-Dikpālas and Kṣetrapati

The Dikpālas are said to be eight in number and the seeds of their origin could be traced in the form of Lokapālas in the *Atharvaveda* in which one comes across the mention of six *lokas*, which are said to be governed by the eight lords which include Agni, Indra, Varuṇa, Soma, Viṣṇu and Bṛhaspati—

ये ऽस्यां स्थ प्राच्यां दिशि हेतयो नाम देवास्तेषां वो अग्निरिषवः।
ते नो मूडतते नोऽधि बूत तेभ्यो वो नमस्तेभ्यो वः स्वाहा॥
तेऽस्यां दक्षिणायां दिश्य विष्यवो नाम देवास्तेषां वः काम इषवः।

—*Atharvaveda*, 3.26.1-2

The details of these Dikpālas as described in the *Atharvaveda* are tabulated hereunder—

Direction	Dikpāla	Weapon
(i) East	Agni	Vajra
(ii) South	Avasyava	Desires
(iii) West	Vairāja	Rainfall
(iv) North	Pravidhyant	Arrows
(v) Nether regions	Nilimpā	Oṣadhis
(vi) Upper regions	Avasvanta	Bṛhaspati

In the next Sūkta of the same Veda, the names besides the attributes of each one of the Dikpālas are noted below—

(i) East	Agni	Āditya as the shooter of the arrows
(ii) South	Indra	Pitṛidevas as arrows
(iii) West	Varuṇa	Cereals are the arrows
(iv) North	Soma	Aṣni as arrows
(v) Nether world	Viṣṇu	Oṣadhis
(vi) Upper regions	Bṛhaspati	Waters

Thus the Vedic texts testify to the existence of six Dikpālas only. The names of the same six lords of the directions have also been repeated in *Taittirīya Samhitā* (5.5.10.1-2) of the *Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda*, except that the name of Yama has been replaced for Viṣṇu. The lords of the directions also find a mention in the *Gobhila Gṛhya Sūtra* (4.7.41), increasing the number of the directions of the universe from six to ten. The details about the ten Dikpālas are given hereunder—

- | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| (i) Indra for east. | (ii) Vāyu for south-east. |
| (iii) Yama for the south. | (iv) Pitṛ for south-west. |
| (v) Varuṇa for west. | (vi) Mahārājā for north-west. |
| (vii) Soma for north. | (viii) Mahendra for north-east. |
| (ix) Vāsuki for netherworld. | (x) Brahmā for the sky. |

The same number of the Dikpālas has been mentioned in the *Aparājitaṭṭhā*, which is based on the *Gobhila Gṛhya Sūtra*. The number of the Dikpālas has been defined as four in the *Mahākāvya*s. In the *Rāmāyaṇa* (2.16.14), Indra, Varuṇa, Yama and Kubera, have been described to be the lords of east, south, west and north directions. In the *Mahābhārata* only four of the Dikpālas have been mentioned as Indra, Agni, Varuṇa and Yama (3.55.6) and Agni, Yama, Varuṇa besides Soma (8.45.31-32). In the *Harivaṃśa Purāṇa*, Indra has been described to be the ruler of the three worlds, allotting south to Yama, Varuṇa to the west and Kubera to the north. In the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* (58.42; 58.57) only four of the Dikpālas viz., Indra, Yama, Varuṇa and Kubera are mentioned.

The *Manusmṛti* (5.56) mentions about eight Dikpālas—Soma, Agni, Sūrya, Vāyu, Indra, Kubera, Varuṇa and Yama. The same list of the Dikpālas has been more or less repeated in the *Aparājitaṭṭhā* (213.9-16), *Rūpamaṇḍana* (2.31-38), *Devatāmūrtiprakaraṇam* (4.49-66) as Indra, Agni, Yama, Nirati, Varuṇa, Vāyu, Kubera and Iśāna. The same list of Dikpālas is mostly repeated in the Purāṇas as well as the Digambara tradition of the Jainas. But the Śvetāmbara tradition of the Jainas as well as the Buddhist text speak of only four Dikpālas.

The Dikpālas are usually considered to be eight who are represented in human form in the Indian plastic art; they were depicted in the sculptural art as four armed or two armed. In the *Aparājitaṭṭhā*, *Rūpamaṇḍana* and *Devatāmūrtiprakaraṇam*, the Dikpālas have been depicted with four arms, whereas in the *Matsya Purāṇa* (259.65-69 and 260.9-23), *Mānasollāsa* (2.3.1.772-96), *Śilparatna* (2.25.1-35) and the *Śilparatna-Saṃyojitam*, describes them with two arms. Though the concept of four armed Dikpālas is found in the *Viṣṇudharmottara* (Part-III, Ch. 50-53, 55-58) and *Skanda Purāṇa* (2.9.27.67-86), but in spite of other Dikpālas having four arms, Niṣṭi and Vāyu alone are stated to have two arms. Similarly there are some variations in the case of the vehicles of Dikpālas. In the *Mahābhārata* the vehicles of all the four Dikpālas are stated to be the elephants, while other texts have some variations in their vehicles.

As for the question of the worship of the Lokapālas is concerned, the adoration of the gods like Indra, Agni, Yama, Niṣṭi, Varuṇa, Vāyu are frequently mentioned¹ in the epics, Indra is conceived to be the god of rains.² But during this period, however, the evidence of the fall in their popularity could be noticed. As for example—

- (i) In the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*,³ there is an episode of Ahalyā in which Indra seduces the wife of Gautama, earning a curse from the sage.
- (ii) Because of the curse of Gautama,⁴ Indra developed a thousand vaginas over his body, which were later on turned into eyes.

- (iii) In the Purāṇas,⁵ Kṛṣṇa is said to have objected to the worship of Indra.
- (iv) Kṛṣṇa reaches the abode of Varuṇa in order to protect his father and Varuṇa in turn adores Kṛṣṇa.⁶
- (v) In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the messengers of Yama are said to flee after the arrival of the messengers of Viṣṇu.⁷
- (vi) It has also been stated in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*⁸, that all the Dikpālas including Indra, Nirati, Soma, Agni, Īśa, Vāyu and Sūrya are controlled by lord Viṣṇu.

Evidently in the post-Vedic literature as well as the Indian plastic art, particularly of the medieval times, the gods like Indra and others had practically lost the earlier grace and were reduced to the position of Dikpālas who were represented on the walls of the medieval temples or the entrance gates. The *Śilpaśāstras* of the medieval period also defined the iconographical features of Dikpālas, glimpses of which are provided as under—

1. Indra

The Vedic evidence of Indra has been described earlier but his personality as well as the iconographical features have been elaborately discussed in the medieval texts. According to this description, Indra has to be projected riding over an elephant being the lord of the east, having a thousand eyes. His one hand is raised in *varada-mudrā* and the remaining three hands are to hold a *vajra*, *aṁkuśa* and *kamaṇḍalu*. The *Aṁśubhedāgama* describes Indra to be of dark complexion, clad in red garments, adorned with *kirīṭa-mukuta*, and other ornaments. He has to hold a *sakti* in the right hand and an *aṁkuśa* in the left one. He should have a protruding belly and a long neck and Śacī, his spouse, has to appear to his left. He should have two eyes, pleasant face and be seated over a lion throne or over the back of the elephant—

श्यामवर्ण(र्ण) द्विहस्तं च रक्ताम्बरधरं शुभम्।
किरीटमकुटोपेतं सर्वाभरणभूषितम्॥
शक्तिर्दक्षिणहस्ते तु वामहस्तेऽङ्कुशं धृतम्।
विशालोदरग्रीवं च वामे शचीसमन्वितम्॥
द्विनेत्रं सौम्यवदनं सिंहासनोपरि स्थितम्।
आसीनं वा प्रकर्तव्यं गजारूढमथापि वा॥
इन्द्रमेवं समाख्यातमश्विन्यौ च प्रवक्ष्यते।

The *Suprabhedāgama* follows the description of the *Aṁśubhedāgama* and states that Indra holding an *aṁkuśa* and *vajra* should be mounted over an elephant—

इन्द्रमैन्द्रे तु मतिमास्त्विन्द्रो वज्राङ्कुशोधरात्।
श्यामाङ्गं तु गजारूढमप्सरोगणसंयुतम्॥

The *Brhatsaṁhitā* prescribes three eyes for Indra, who should hold a *vajra* in his hands—

शुक्लश्चतुर्विषाणो द्विपो महेन्द्रस्य वज्रपाणित्वं च।
तिर्यग्ललाटसंस्थं तृतीयमपि लोचनं चिह्नम्॥

The *Śilparatna* says that Indra should be mounted over the elephant Airāvata and should be adorned with the *kirīṭa* crown, *kuṇḍalas* and other ornaments. He should have a *vajra* in his right hand and a lotus in the left hand. The *chowri*-bearers should flank him. His spouse Indrāṇī should stand to his left—

सुरराजं प्रवक्ष्येऽहमैरावतसमाश्रितम्।
किरीटकुण्डलधरं भुजद्वयसमन्वितम्॥
कुलिशं दक्षिणे पाणौ वामहस्ते तथोत्पलम्।
दिव्यरत्नविभूषाढ्यं दिव्यचीनांशुकैर्युतम्॥
चित्रचामरधारिण्यौ स्त्रियौ पार्श्वे प्रकल्पयेत्।
सिंहासनस्थमथवा लिखेद् गन्धर्वसंयुतम्॥
इन्द्राणीं वामतस्तस्य लिखेदुत्पलधारिणीम्।
दिव्य शृङ्गारसंयुक्तामिन्द्रवक्रावलोकिनीम्॥

The *Viṣṇudharmottara* prescribes four tusks for the elephant of Indra which should be of white colour. Śacī, his spouse should appear on the left, clad in blue costumes and having lustre of the gold. He should be four armed or even two armed and should hold *aṁkuśa*, lotus in his right and left hands—

चतुर्दन्ते गजे सक्तः श्वेतः कार्यस्सुरेश्वरः।
वामोत्सङ्गता कार्या तस्य भार्या शची नृपः॥
नीलवस्त्रा सुवर्णाभा सर्वाभरणवांस्तथा।
तिर्यग्ललाटकस्ताक्षर्यः(स्थाक्षः?) कर्तव्यश्च विभूषितः॥
शक्रश्चतुर्भुजः कार्यो द्विभुजा च तथा शशी(ची?)।
पद्माङ्गुशौ च कर्तव्यौ वामदक्षिणहस्तयोः॥
वामं शचीपृष्ठगतं द्वितीयं वज्रसंयुतम्।
वामे शच्याः करे कार्या रम्या सन्तानमञ्जरी॥
दक्षिणं पृष्ठविन्यस्तं देवराजस्य कारयेत्।

The *Pūrvakāraṇāgama* desires Indra to be clad in red garments, wearing a smile over his face. He should be adorned with all the ornaments besides the *kirīṭa* crown and should be mounted over the elephant—

वज्रपाणिर्महावीरस्सिंहस्कन्धोऽवलीलधृक्।
ललाटोरस्थलायामपीवरोरुर्महोदरः॥
प्रसन्नवदनश्श्यामवर्णो रक्ताम्बरस्सुखी।
किरीटकुण्डली हारकेयूरादिविभूषितः॥
पृथुशिरोगजारूढो देवराजश्शचीपतिः।
शक्रस्याकृतिरेवं तु चण्डेशस्याकृतिं शृणु॥

The *Rūpamaṇḍana*, however, declares Indra as having a thousand eyes and the protector of the eastern direction—

वरं वरङ्कुशौ चैव कुण्डौ धत्ते करैस्तु यः।
गजारूढः सहस्राक्ष इन्द्रः पूर्वदिशाधिपः॥

The images of Indra have been frequently found in the sculptural art of the western region and central India. Some of the specimens are also available in the south. Chitorgarh, Apurna (Rajasthan), Khajuraho (Madhya Pradesh) and Chidambaram are the sites known for the images of Indra. A sculpture from the Indore Museum, which has been identified as Indra (though the identification is doubtful), depicts the god standing holding a noose in the left hand and a sword in the right hand. The vehicle which stands behind the god could be anything except an elephant (Refer to Pl. 15).

2. Agni

The descriptive details of the god in the Vedic and post-Vedic period have already been described earlier but his presence in the Indian plastic art which became more popular in the medieval times are discussed here. In the *Aparājitapṛcchā*, he has been described to be mounted over a ram holding a *śruva* in his hands. As per the *Rūpamaṇḍana* as well as the *Devatāmūrtiprakaraṇam*, Agni is required to be like the fire flames mounted over the ram. One of his hands should be held in *varada-mudrā* and the remaining three should hold a *śakti*, lotus and *kamaṇḍalu*—

वरदः शक्तिहस्तश्च समृणालकमण्डलुः।
ज्वालापुञ्जनिभो देवो मेषारूढो हुताशनः॥

Suprabhedāgama describes Agni to be four armed, having red complexion, holding *varada* and *abhaya mudrās* besides a *śakti* and *śruva*. He should have a single face with three eyes.

वचमीह वह्निरूपं तु रक्तवर्णं चतुर्भुजम्।
वरदाभयहस्तं च.....॥
शक्तिस्स्यादपरे वामे दक्षिणे तु स्तुचं धरम्।
एकाननं त्रिनेत्रं च रक्तकेशोर्ध्वमेव च॥
वह्निरूपं समाख्यातमेवं धामनि विन्यसेत्।

The *Śilparatna*, on the other hand, describes Agni to have the complexion of pure gold and should wear red garments, seated over a seat of crescent, wearing a *yajñopavitaṁ*, riding a ram. He should have two arms holding *akṣasūtra* in the right one and a *kamaṇḍalu* in the left. His spouse Svāhā, plastered in red ochre should be besides him on the left—

वह्नेस्स्वरूपं वक्ष्यामि शुद्धकाञ्चनसुप्रभम्।
अर्धचन्द्रासनगतं रक्तवस्त्रविराजितम्॥
लोहितं वा प्रकुर्वीत बालार्कसमतेजसम्।
युक्तं यज्ञोपवीतेन लम्बकूर्चेन शोभितम्॥

मेषपृष्ठस्थितं देवं भुजद्वयसमन्वितम्।
 दक्षिणे चाक्षसूत्रं स्यात् करे वामे कमण्डलुः॥
 स्वाहादेवी कृता पार्श्वे कुङ्कुमेन विलेपिता।
 अरुणैरम्बरैर्भव्या लेख्या मात्र (?) विभूषिता॥
 कुण्डस्थो वा प्रकर्तव्यो हव्यवाहो विचक्षणैः।
 ज्वालाभिस्सप्तशीर्षेण शोभमानो महाद्युतिः॥

The *Viṣṇudharmottara* has described Agni to wear the red matted locks of hair over the head, having three eyes. He should be four armed and having four protruding teeth and should be accompanied with Svāhā—

रक्तं जटाधरं वह्निं कारयेद्भुजवाससम्।
 ज्वालामालाकुलं सौम्यं त्रिनेत्रं श्मश्रुधारिणम्॥
 चतुर्बाहुं चतुर्दंष्ट्रं देवेशं वायुसारथिम्।
 चतुर्भिश्च शुकैर्युक्ते घूमचिह्नस्थे स्थितम्॥
 वामोत्सङ्गता स्वाहा शक्रस्येव शची भवेत्।
 रत्नपात्रकरा देवी वह्नेर्दक्षिणहस्तयोः॥
 ज्वालात्रिशूले कर्तव्ये त्वक्षमाल्यं च वामके।

The *Pūrvakaraṇāgama* describes Agni almost similarly with minor variations, providing him ram as a vehicle—

अर्धचन्द्रासनासीनो ब्रह्मरूपो हुताशनः।
 प्रज्वलत्काञ्चनज्योतिः पिङ्गलः पिङ्गलोचनः॥
 हेमकूर्चाग्रसदृशस्वरूपं च शिरोरुहम्।
 तरुणादित्यसंकाशं तद्वस्त्रमुपवीतकम्॥
 अक्षमाला च शक्तिश्च दक्षिणेऽदक्षिणेऽपि च।
 ज्वालामालाकुलं तीव्रं पार्श्वस्थान्य(स्थं ह्य?)शुमण्डलम्॥
 मेषारूढं च कुण्डस्थो योगपट्रेन वेष्टितम्।
 दक्षिणे तु स्थिता स्वाहा रत्नकुण्डलमण्डिता॥
 अग्नेराकृतिरेवं स्याच्छृणु वैवस्वताकृतिम्।

The images of Agni are frequently met with in Indian art in the western and central region, but those sculptured strictly according to the provision of the texts are quite rare. Some such images are available from Chitorgarh, Nagada, Khajuraho and others. Indeed, in the medieval times, Agni like Brahmā, is shown holding a *kamaṇḍalu* and a book.

An image of standing Agni from Panchamahā Devī temple, depicts holding possibly a *śruva*, while the attribute of the right hand is indistinct. The image of four-armed Agni from the Vetāsa temple, Vetāsa, depicts the god standing in *tribhaṅga* posture holding flames in two upper arms. The left lower arm is in *kaṣīhastā* position, while right lower hand holds a sack. The image belongs to the tenth century AD (Refer to Pls. 16-17).

The eleventh century image of Agni, depicts the god having pot belly, seated in *ardhaparyāṅkāśana* stretching the right leg downwards resting over a cushion of lotus flower. His right hand is broken, while the left hand holds a *kamaṇḍalu*. He wears a beautiful crown of raised matted locks of hair, the beard, the moustaches, a *yajñopavīta*, a necklace, armlets and wristlets. The eyes are protruding. The vehicle shown at the pedestal looks more like a deer than ram. The twelfth century image of Agni from Jabalpur Museum, depicts the god seated with his spouse holding a *śruva* in his upper right hand, while the lower right hand is bent in the front. The goddess is seated over the left thigh of the god, and is adorned with all the ornaments besides a beautiful hair style (Refer to Pls. 18-19).

The eleventh century image of Agni from the Allahabad Museum, depicts the four armed god standing in *tribhaṅga* posture holding a *śruva* in his upper right hand while the lower right hand holds a rosary displaying *varada-mudrā*. The upper left hand holds an object, while the lower left hand holds a *kamaṇḍalu*. The ram, the vehicle, is shown seated to the left. An image of Agni from the National Museum, New Delhi, depicts the god, possibly four armed, with a crown of matted locks of hair over the head. He wears a beard and moustaches, besides all other ornaments. The hands and their attributes are broken and a tiny sized ram appears to the left of the god down below (Refer to Pls. 20-21).

3. Yama

The image of Vaivasvata Yama emanating from the Vedic and post-Vedic literature has already been discussed together with other Vedic gods in this account, but the god in the subsequent period did not lose his importance, inspite of his being declared as a lord of the southern direction. His iconographical features were brought out in the *Aparājītapṛcchā*, *Rūpamaṇḍana*, *Devatāmūrtiprakaraṇam* and other texts. In the *Amśubhedāgama*, he is described to possess two arms, holding a sword and a *kheṭaka*, and of black complexion. He should have terrific fangs in the mouth, and should have a garland of red flowers around his neck. He should be clad in red garments and wear a *kirīṭa-mukuṭa* over the head. His eyes should look like the burning flames and should be mounted over a great buffalo—

द्विभुजः कृष्णवर्णस्तु खड्गखेटकधारिणी ।
 करालदंष्ट्रवदनो रक्तमाल्यानुलेपनः ॥
 रक्तवस्त्रधरोग्रश्च किरीटमकुटान्वितः ।
 दीप्ताग्निसदृशश्च महामहिषवाहनः ॥
 यमस्त्वेवं हि पार्श्वस्थौ तमिस्रौ चोग्रवक्त्रकौ ।
 चित्रगुप्तः कलिश्चैव द्वारपार्श्वे तु संस्थितौ ॥
 कृष्णश्यामनिभौ तौ च रक्तवस्त्रसिता(धरा?) वुभौ ।
 पीठपार्श्वस्थितौ मृत्युसहितादु(संहितौ व्यु?)ग्रतेजसौ ॥
 नीललोहितसङ्काशौ द्वौ चामरधृते स्त्रियौ ।
 पुरतः संस्थितौ विप्रौ धर्माधर्म समाह्वयौ ॥

यमस्सिंहासनासीनो महिषारोहितस्तु वा।
यमलक्षणमाख्यातं रोहिणीलक्षणं शृणु॥

The description of the *Suprabhedāgama* of the god is quite short in which Yama is stated to be mounted over a buffalo and holding a *yamadaṇḍa* in his hand. He is to have a terrific face and of black complexion—

यमं सुदण्डहस्तं तु महिषासनसंस्थितम्।
करालं कालवर्णं च फलपल्लवपाणिनम्॥

The texts of *Rūpamaṇḍana* and *Pūrvakāraṇāgama* also have similar descriptions of the god of death—

दण्डपाणिर्महादीप्तः कालाञ्जनसमच्छविः।
महामहिषिकारूढो दीप्ताग्निसमलोचनः॥ —*Pūrvakāraṇāgama*
लेखनीं पुस्तकं धत्ते कुक्कुटं दण्डमेव च।
महामहिषमारूढो यमः कृष्णाङ्ग ईरितः॥ —*Rūpamaṇḍana*

The *Śilparatna*, however, describes Yama to be of blue complexion holding a *yamadaṇḍa*, a *pāśa* and the bows. His eyes should be burning in flames. He should either be seated over a lion throne or a buffalo and be flanked by the goddess of death and Citragupta. He should be flanked by terrific attendants, besides the gods and the demons—

पितृराजं प्रवक्ष्यामि नीलाञ्जनसमच्छविम्।
दण्डं पाशं धनुर्दोर्भ्यां प्रदीप्ताग्निविलोचनम्॥
महामहिषमारूढं सिंहासनमथापि वा।
मृत्युना चित्रगुप्तेन पार्श्वयोरुपशोभितम्॥
करालैः किंकरीष्वैव सुरासुरगणैस्तथा।
धर्मिभिः पापिभिश्चैव सेव्यमानं निरन्तरम्॥

The *Viṣṇudharmottara*'s description of the god of death is quite elaborate, according to which, Yama should have the clothes of the colour of black clouds, mounted over the buffalo and adorned with all the ornaments. He should be of blue complexion, like the blue lotus flowers. He should be four armed, holding a *daṇḍa*, a sword in his right hands, and the flames and a trident in his left hands. In his left hand he should also hold an *akṣamālā*—

सजलाम्बुदसच्छायस्तप्तचामीकराम्बरः।
महिषस्थश्च कर्तव्यस्सर्वाभरणवान् यमः॥
नीलोत्पलाभां धूम्रोर्णा(धूमोर्णा?) वामोत्सङ्गे च कारयेत्।
धूम्रोर्णा(धूमोर्णा?) द्विभुजा कार्या यमः कार्यश्चतुर्भुजः॥
दण्डखड्गावुभौ कार्यौ यमदक्षिणहस्तयोः।
ज्वाला त्रिशूला कर्तव्या त्वक्षमाला च वामके॥

दण्डोपरि मुखं कार्यं ज्वालामालाविभूषणम्।
 धूम्रोर्णा(धूमोर्णा?) दक्षिणो हस्तो यमपृष्ठगतो भवेत्॥
 वामे तस्याः करे कार्यं मातुलुङ्गं सुदर्शनम्।
 पार्श्वे तु दक्षिणे तस्य चित्रगुप्तं तु कारयेत्॥
 आपीच्यवेषं स्वाकारं द्विभुजं सौम्यदर्शनम्।
 दक्षिणे लेखनी तस्य वामे पत्रं तु कारयेत्॥
 वामे पाशधरः कार्यः कालो विकटदर्शनः।

The four armed images of Yama are available in western, southern and central India. In the image of Yama at Khajuraho only one or two attributes of the god are visible. The image of Yama from the Patalesvara temple, Anantapur in the south, belongs to the tenth century AD and depicts Yama mounted over the buffalo with his consort, which is moving fast raising his fore legs. His attendants holding staff also accompany him. An eighth century image of Yama from Guna district of Madhya Pradesh depicts the god standing erect, wearing a smile over the face. He holds a *khaṭvāṅga* in his right hand, while his left hand is placed in *kaṭihasta* position. A twelfth century image of Yama from Darasuram, depicts the god seated in *ardhaparyāṅkāśana*, with his right leg placed over the hand of a flying human figure (could be Garuḍa). He holds a club in his right hand and the object held in his left hand placed over his thigh is not quite distinct. The tenth century image of Yama from the Devī temple, Panchamahā, depicts the god standing in *tribhaṅga* posture. The right hand holds the staff while the left one is placed over the left thigh in *kaṭihasta-mudrā*. He wears a raised crown made of the matted locks of hair over the head, beaded necklace around the neck, ear-rings in the ears, besides other ornaments. The buffalo (which looks more like a ram) appears at the feet with the head raised (Refer to Pls. 22-25).

4. Nirṛti

Nirṛti is considered to be a god in the *Rgveda* and the *Atharvaveda*. The word Nirṛti is taken to mean destruction, assimilation, misfortune, disease and misfortune (ऋक् सौम्या निरृतिं चैषा... परे॥ *Bṛhatsamhitā*, 7.92). There is a hymn in the *Atharvaveda*, which claims that in case an ailing person departs from this world and reaches the abode of Yama, or Nirṛti, he could be brought back from that place. (यदिक्षितायुर्यदि वा परेतो यदि मृत्युरन्तिकं नीत एव।... निरृतिं रूपपस्थादस्याशमिन् शत शारदाय॥ *Atharvaveda*, 3.11.2). Nirṛti has been described as the god of sins.

Nirṛti has been described in the *Aparājita-prcchā* as being carried over the shoulder of this goblins holding a sword. In another context she is said to be mounted over a dead body holding a sword. Besides she has been variously described in the *Rūpamaṇḍana* and *Devatāmūrtiprakaraṇam*. In the *Aṁśubhedāgama*, it has been conceived that she has two arms, a gigantic body, holding a sword and *kheṭaka* in his two hands. She has to be clad in yellow lower garment and should have terrific protruding horrible looking fangs. She should be adorned with all the ornaments besides various types of flowers. She has developed breasts. She should wear a smile over her face and her body should have several types fragrance applied on her—

निर्ऋतिर्नीलवर्णस्तु द्विभुजश्च महातनुः।
 खड्गं दक्षिणहस्तेन वामहस्तेन खेटकम्॥
 पीतवस्त्रधरं रौद्रं करालास्यं च दंष्ट्रिणम्।
 सर्वाभरणसंयुक्तं नानापुष्पैरलङ्कृतम्॥
 दुकूलवसनास्सर्वाः पीनोरुजघनस्तनाः।
 मध्यक्षामातिसौम्याश्च किञ्चित्प्रहसिताननाः॥
 नानागन्धानुलिप्ताङ्गा भद्रपीठोपरि स्थिताः।
 समभङ्गसमायुक्तास्सप्तसङ्ख्याप्सरास्मृताः॥
 अप्सरैश्च समायुक्तो निर्ऋतिश्च विशेषतः।
 निर्ऋतिस्त्वेवमाख्यातं वरुणस्त्वथ वक्ष्यते॥

The *Suprabhedāgama* describes her to be holding a sword and a *khetaka*, and mounted over a lion. She is to have black complexion—

खड्गखेटकसंयुक्तं निर्ऋतिश्यामवर्णकम्।
 करालं विकृताकारं सिंहारूढं द्विनेत्रकम्॥

The *Śilparatna* desires her to be mounted over a dead body, having the complexion of the black clouds and holding a sword and a *khetaka*. She should be clad in yellow lower garments—

राक्षसं संप्रवक्ष्यामि नैऋते स्थितम्।
 नरयानसमारूढं रक्षि(क्षो?)भिर्बहुभिश्चितम्॥
 कालमेघसमाभासं खड्गखेटकधारिणम्।
 पीतवस्त्रपरीधानं स्वर्णभूषाविभूषितम्॥

In the *Viṣṇudharmottara*, *Niṛṛti* is considered to be the spouse of *Virūpākṣa*, while maintaining all other features—

विरूपाक्षो विवृता(वृता?)स्यः प्राशु(प्रांशु?)दंष्ट्रोऽज्वलाननः।
 ऊर्ध्वकेशी खरस्थश्च द्विबाहुर्भीषणाननः॥
 कर्णेन कृष्णरक्ताङ्गः कृष्णाम्बरधरस्तथा।
 सर्वाभरणवान् दंष्ट्रासङ्घैर्दण्डधरस्तथा॥
 भार्याश्चित्तस्रः कर्तव्या देवी च निर्ऋतिस्तथा।
 कृष्णाङ्गी कृष्णवदना पाशहस्ता तु वामतः॥

Interestingly, the text of *Rūpamaṇḍana* prescribes a dog as the vehicle of *Niṛṛti*—

खड्गं च खेटकं हस्तैः कर्तिकां वैरिमस्तकम्।
 दंष्ट्राकरालवदनं श्वानारूढश्च राक्षसः॥

The text of *Pūrvakāraṇāgama* speaks on the lines of the other texts about *Niṛṛti*—

राक्षसेशो विशालाक्षः पीतवस्त्रशशासनः।
 निर्ऋतिस्सुस्थितासीनः खड्गहस्तो महोज्ज्वलः॥

The images of Nīṛṭi are comparable to those of Agni and Yama, which are available in Chittorgarh victory pillar, and the Vaiṣṇava temples at Khajuraho, Sohania and in the south. Interestingly, the deity of Nīṛṭi has been conceived as a male as well as a female, when she is described to be the wife of Virūpākṣa. No female figures of Nīṛṭi are available but male figures of the Dīkṣā are frequently met with. There is an image of Nīṛṭi over the second storey of the victory pillar at Chittorgarh, depicting the god standing in *dvibhaṅga* posture, but the image has been given the caption of Bhairava, which is nude. The other image of Nīṛṭi is from Adbhutanātha temple, where he is shown as four armed. The image of Nīṛṭi from Belur, Chitaldurga district, depicts the deity standing nude in *tribhaṅga* posture, holding a sword in the right hand, while the left hand is broken (Refer to Pl. 26).

5. Varuṇa

Varuṇa as a god has been described in the Vedic and post-Vedic literature. These details have been discussed earlier with other Vedic gods. But Varuṇa, as a Dīkṣā has been quite popular during the mediæval times and the iconography of his images has been variously described in the texts. In the *Amśubhedāgama*, Varuṇa has been stated to possess two arms, holding a *pāśa* in his hand and using crocodile as the vehicle—

वरुणश्शुक्लवर्णस्तु द्विभुजः पाशहस्तकः।
सर्वाभरणसंयुक्तः करण्डमकुटान्वितः॥
पीतवस्त्रधरश्शान्तो महाबलसमन्वितः।
यज्ञसूत्रसमायुक्तो मकरस्थानकासनः॥

The *Suprabhedāgama* on the other hand prescribes a fair complexion for him with a *pāśa* and *varada-mudrā* as his attributes—

वरुणं पाशहस्तं तु शुक्लवर्णसमप्रभम्।
अन्यहस्तेन वरदं सर्वाभरणभूषितम्॥

The *Viṣṇudharmottara* provides elaborate description of Varuṇa, having fair complexion, pot belly, adorned with a garland of gems, and all other ornaments; he has to hold a flag in the left hand and should be allowed a crocodile as the vehicle. He has to be accompanied with his beautiful spouse—

सप्तहंसे रथे कार्यो वरुणो यादसां पतिः।
स्निग्धवैदूर्यसंकाशः श्वेताम्बरधरस्तथा॥
किञ्चित्प्रलम्बजठरो मुक्ताहारविभूषितः।
सर्वाभरणवान् राजन् ! महादेवश्चतुर्भुजः॥
वामभागगतं केतुं मकरं तस्य कारयेत्।
छत्रं तु सुसितं मूर्ध्नि भार्या सर्वाङ्गसुन्दरी॥
वामोत्सङ्गता कार्या मध्ये तु द्विभुजा नृप॥
उत्पलं कारयेद्दामे दक्षिणे(णं?) देवपृष्ठगम्॥

पद्मपाशौ करे कार्यौ देवदक्षिणहस्तयोः।
 शङ्खं च रत्नपात्रं च वामयोस्तस्य कारयेत्॥
 भागे तु दक्षिणे गङ्गा मकरस्था सचामरा।
 देवी पद्मकरा कार्या चन्द्रगौरी वरानना॥
 वामे तु यमुना कार्या कूर्मसंस्था सचामरा।
 नीलोत्पलकरा सौम्या नीलनीरजसन्निभा॥

The *Pūrvakāraṇāgama* describes Varuṇa to be of white complexion like the conch, who should hold a *pāśa* in his hand. *Makara* is said to be his vehicle—

शङ्खकुन्देन्दुधवलः पाशहस्तो महाबलः।
 केयूरकुण्डली हारी पीतवासास्सुशोभनः॥
 आसीनो वा स्थितो वापि मकरे वरुणस्मृतः।

The *Rūpamaṇḍana*, however, conceives Varuṇa as the one having four arms holding a *varada-mudrā*, a *pāśa*, a snake and *kuṇḍika*—

वरं पाशौ व्यलं कुण्डी हस्तैर्बिभ्रत्क्रमाच्च यः।
 नक्रारूढः स कर्तव्यो वरुणः पश्चिमाश्रितः॥

The *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, *Matsya Purāṇa*, *Agni Purāṇa*, *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, *Skanda Purāṇa* and *Mānasollāsa* also speak on the subject almost similarly.

The image of Varuṇa are found in the form of a Dikpāla in the mediieval temples at Chittorgarh, Bhavnagar (Gujarat), Sohania, Ajaigarh (Madhya Pradesh) and several other sites.

A defaced image of Varuṇa from Pattadahā belonging to the eighth century AD depicts him seated over a *makara* with his right hand raised and the left hand possibly holds the noose which is broken. Another image of Dikpāla from Guna, depicts the god standing in *tribhaṅga* pose, holding a noose in his raised left hand, while the right hand falling down holds an indistinct object. A tenth century image of Varuṇa from the Devī temple, Panchamahā, depicts the Dikpāla, holding a *pāśa* in his left arm and the right hand is held in *kaṭihasta* (?) resting over the right thigh. He has a *karaṇḍa-mukuṭa* over his head. A stone sculpture of Varuṇa, dating back to the twelfth century AD depicts him seated over the crocodile, which looks more like an animal than the crocodile. He wears the beard; moustaches, *yajñopavīta* and a necklace. The beard is conical, the eyes are large. He holds a *pāśa* in the right hand and possibly a lotus bud in his left hand. An eighth century image of Varuṇa from Nachana Kathura (Madhya Pradesh) is a beautiful specimen of the age. He is four armed holding a noose in the upper right hand, while the lower right hand falls downwards in *varada-mudrā*. The upper left holds a lotus bud while the lower left holds a *kamaṇḍalu*. He wears a *jaṭāmukuṭa* of the beautiful locks of hair, a necklace, long garland of flowers (Refer to Pls. 27-31).

6. Vāyu

The Vedic aspect of the windgod Vāyu has already been brought out in the section dealing with the Vedic gods in this work but during the period of the epics he was more popular as the wind god and during the medieval period he came to be known as Dikpāla and occupied suitable places in the temples. Simultaneously his iconography also developed. The *Arṇabhedāgama* prescribes that he should hold a flag in his right hand and a *daṇḍa* in his left hand. He should be adorned with various types of ornaments and should be made to occupy a lion throne—

द्विभुजस्तु महीवीर्यस्ताम्राक्षो धूम्रसन्निभः।
ध्वजं वै दक्षिणे हस्ते वामहस्ते तु दण्डधृक्॥
कुञ्चितभ्रूयुतो वायुः श्वेताम्बरविभूषितः।
नानाभरणसंयुक्तः केशाढ्यः केशैस्तु सुविकीर्णकः॥
सिंहासनोपरिष्ठानु शीघ्रयात्रोत्सुकः स्थितः।
वायुरेवं समाख्यातो रुद्रलक्षणमुच्यते॥

The *Suprabhedāgama* states that he should be of smoke colour, be mounted over a stag, holding a flag—

अनिलं धूम्रवर्णं तु मृगारूढं ध्रुवं(धृत?)ध्वजम्।
सव्येऽङ्गुशधरं श्यामं चात्मानं विधिवद् गतम्॥

The *Śilparatna* also prescribes a stag as his vehicle, clad in yellow lower garment, adorned with all the beautiful ornaments, holding the *varada-mudrā* in the right hand and a flag in his left hand—

समीरणं प्रवक्ष्यामि सूत्रहरिणवाहनम्।
पीताम्बरधरं देवं चित्ररत्नविभूषितम्॥
वरदं दक्षिणं हस्तं वामहस्तं पताकयम्(या?)।
विभ्राणं कुण्डलोपेतं किरीटवरधारिणम्॥

The *Viṣṇudharmottara* says that Vāyu should be of the sky colour and should have two arms and should be sculptured with his wife—

वायुरम्बरवर्णस्तु तदाकाराम्बरो भवेत्।
काष्ठपूरितचक्रस्तु द्विभुजो रूपसंयुतः॥
गमनेच्छुश्रिवा भार्या तस्य कार्या च वामतः।
कार्यो गृहीतचक्रः करभ्यां पवनो द्विजः॥
तथैव देवी कर्तव्या शिवा परमसुन्दरी।
व्यावृतास्यस्तथा कार्यो देवो व्याकुलमूर्धजः॥

The *Rūpamaṇḍana* too prescribes the *varada-mudrā* and a flag as the attributes of the two hands of Vāyu with a stag as his vehicle—

वरं ध्वजं पताका च कमण्डलुकैरैर्दधत्।
मृगारूढो हरिद्वर्म(र्णः?) पवनो वायुदिक्पतिः॥

The *Aparājita* *prcchā* too prescribes a stag as the vehicle of Vāyu and only one flag for him.

In the sculptural art he is represented variously and it has been already been brought that the exclusive temples of the god Vāyu are also met with in the coastal regions of western India. A standing image of Vāyu comes from Indore in Guna district of Madhya Pradesh in which he is shown standing in *dvibhaṅga* posture holding a flag in the right hand while the left one rests in the *kaṭihasta* position. Though this figure seems to be a female one which is evident from its headdress and the breast, but it has been identified as that of Vāyu which is quite doubtful. The vehicle could be anything except a stag and looks more like a horse or a lion(?). The image of Vāyu from Belur (Chitaldurga) displays Vāyu seated with his wife over a fast galloping horse accompanied by the musicians, dancers and the garland carriers. The image belongs to the tenth century AD. An eleventh century headless image of Vāyu depicts him standing in *tribhaṅga* posture, with his vehicle, the stag seated at the feet. Both his hands are broken and the image is preserved in the Allahabad Museum. A tenth century image of Vāyu from Jhalrapatan, depicts Vāyu holding a flag in the right hand and a *daṇḍa* in the left arm. He is fully ornamented and his head is adorned with a beautiful *jaṭāmukuta* which is quite raised. The stag, his vehicle, appears in the background (Refer to Pls. 32-35).

7. Kubera (Dhanada)

Kubera, the god of riches has been described in the *Amśubhedāgama* as the one having the lustre of the molten gold, having two arms. He should project *varada* or *abhaya-mudrā* or a club in the left hand. He should be adorned with *karaṇḍa mukuta* and on the left, he should hold a bag of riches. He is to be adorned with red garments—

धनदस्सर्वयक्षेशस्सर्वाभरणभूषितः।
तप्तकाञ्चनसङ्काशो हस्तद्वयसमन्वितः॥
वरदाभयहस्तश्च गदां वै वामहस्तके।
करण्डमकुटोपेतस्सितवासोत्तरीयकः॥
दक्षभागे शङ्खनिधिर्वामे पद्मनिधिस्तथा।
धनदस्य तु वामे तु देवीं कुर्यात्सलक्षणाम्॥
पद्मपीठोपरिष्ठातु द्विनेत्रो मेषवाहनः।
रक्ताम्बरधरस्सौम्यश्शङ्खपद्मनिधिर्युतः॥
शङ्खपद्मनिधी द्वौ च भूताकारौ महाबलौ।
आसीनौ पद्मपीठे तु पद्महस्तौ द्विजोत्तमः॥
करण्डमकुटोपेतौ सिताधासोत्तरीयकौ।
धनदं ह्येवमाख्यातं प्राग्वद्वृदांश्च कल्पयेत्॥

The *Suprabhedāgama* describes Kubera as the lord of Yakṣas with dark complexion and terrific looking. He should have two arms and clad in red garments—

यक्षेष् तु गदाहस्तं श्यामरूपं भयावहम्।
द्विबाहुं रक्तवस्त्राढ्यं रक्ताक्षं रक्तपाणिनम्॥

But the *Śilparatna* prescribes white garments, *kirīṭa mukuṭa*, fair complexioned and projecting the eight treasures with him—

हरमित्रं प्रवक्ष्यामि द्रव्यहारविभूषितम्।
किरीटकुण्डलयुतं श्वेताम्बरविराजितम्॥
नरयुक्तविमानस्थं गदापाणिं वरप्रदम्।
महोदरं महाबाहुं गौरवर्णं मनोहरम्॥
अष्टभिर्निधिभिर्युक्तं द्रविणव्यग्रपाणिभिः।
समन्ताद् गुह्यकैर्युक्तं चित्रकर्मणि लेखयेत्॥

The *Viṣṇudharmottara* provides a human vehicle for the god of riches. He should be adorned with all the ornaments and should have two protruding fangs in his mouth. The bag of gems should be placed to his left and he should hold a *gadā* in his right hand—

कर्तव्यः पद्मपत्राभो वरदो नरवाहनः।
चामीकराभो वरदस्सर्वाभरणभूषितः॥
लम्बोदरश्चतुर्बाहुर्मपिङ्गललोचनः।
आपीच्यवेषः कवची हारभारी मनोहरः॥
द्वे च दंष्ट्रे मुखे तस्य कर्तव्ये श्मश्रुधारिणः।
वामेन विभवा कार्या मौलिस्तस्यारिमर्दनः॥
वामोत्सङ्गता कार्या वृद्धिर्देवी वरप्रदा।
देवपृष्ठगतं पाणिं द्विभुजायास्तु दक्षिणम्॥
रत्नपात्रधरं कुर्याद्दामं रिपुनिषूदनः।
गदाशक्ती च कर्तव्ये तस्य दक्षिणहस्तयोः॥
सिंहार्कलक्षणं केतुं शिविकामपि पादयोः(?)।
खड्गपद्मनिधी कार्यौ सरूपौ निधिसंस्थितौ॥
शङ्खपद्माञ्जलिक्रान्तं वदनं तस्य पार्श्वयोः(?)।

The *Rūpamaṇḍana*, on the other hand, requires Kubera to hold a citron and a *gadā* in his two hands and an elephant has been prescribed to be his vehicle—

गदानिधीबीजपूरकमण्डलुधरः करैः।
गजारूढः प्रकर्तव्यः सौम्ययो (?)नरवाहनः॥

The images of Kubera are frequently found in the medieval temples in India. A tenth century image of Kubera from Bharatpur depicts Kubera seated over a cushion, with a protruding

belly folding the left leg, while the right hand holding a citron is placed over the folded and raised right leg. The left hand carries the sack of riches. He wears a beautiful *jaṭāmukuṭa* and circular ear-rings. The face is damaged. An eleventh century image from the Udaipur Museum depicts the bulky and pot-bellied Kubera over the elephant which is shown pressed under the weight of Kubera. The head wears a raised conical *jaṭāmukuṭa* at the top of which a tiny Tirthaṅkara is lodged in a seated position, which goes on to testify that the image belongs to the Jaina sect. The tenth century image of Kubera from the Devī temple, Panchamahā, depicts the god standing holding a sack of treasure in his left hand and the right hand is held in *kaṭihasta-mudrā*. He wears a *karaṇḍa-mukuṭa* over the head (Refer to Pls. 36-38).

8. Iśāna

Śiva too is given the name of Iśāna. He has to appear with a peaceful face adorned with *jaṭāmukuṭa* over the head and clad in white garments according to the *Amśubhedāgama*. He is to carry a trident in the right hand and a skull in the left one—

ईशा वै द्विभुजश्शान्तस्सर्वाभरणभूषितः।
जटामकुटसंयुक्तश्शुक्लवस्त्रद्युतिः स्थितः॥
शुक्लयज्ञोपवीतश्च शुक्लपद्मोपरि स्थितः।
शूलं दक्षिणहस्ते तु कपालं वामहस्तके॥
ईशानमेवमाख्यातं ततो वै भास्कराकृतिः।

The *Suprabhedāgama* prescribes four arms for him, three eyes, holding a trident in his hand and mounted over the bull—

ईशानं तु चतुर्बाहुं त्रिनेत्रं तु जटाधरम्।
शूलपाणिं वृषारूढं वरदाभयपाणिनम्॥

The *Silparatna* describes Iśāna to be of the complexion of the winter moon, mounted over a bull, with a crescent over the head adorned with *jaṭāmukuṭa*. He is to hold a trident in his hand and clad in the tiger skin—

ईशानं संप्रवक्ष्यामि शारदेन्दुसमप्रभम्।
शुभ्रं वृषभमारूढं बालेन्दुकृतशेखरम्॥
जटामण्डलभूषाढ्यं लोचनत्रयभूषितम्।
त्रिशूलपाणिं वरदं व्याघ्रचर्माम्बरावृतम्॥
मणिकुण्डलभूषाढ्यं नागयज्ञोपवीतिनम्।
लिखेदेवविधं देवं चित्रकं चित्रकोविदः॥

The *Rūpamaṇḍana*^(a) and *Pūrvakāraṇāgama*^(b) prescribe Iśāna to be of fair complexion, mounted over a bull, holding a trident and citron—

(a) वृषारूढो महाराजो धवलः पिङ्गलेक्षणः।
त्रिशूलपाणिरीशानस्त्रिनेत्रो लोकशङ्करः॥

(b) वरं तथा त्रिशूलं च भागेद्र(?)बीजपूरकम्।
विभ्राणो वृषभारूढ ईशानो धवलद्युतिः॥

The images of Iṣāna are frequently found in the medieval temples in the country. A ninth century image of Iṣāna from Thanjavur district in the south depicts him four armed holding tridents in right and left hands, while dancing over the back of a human, accompanied by the musicians and the devotees. A tenth century image of Iṣāna depicts him standing holding a trident in the right arm and projecting the right hand in *abhaya-mudrā*. The left arm is missing. He wears a raised *jaṭāmukuṣa* and the bull, his vehicle, is lodged at the feet. An eleventh century image of Iṣāna from Manikpur, Madhya Pradesh, depicts the god standing in *tribhaṅga* posture holding a trident in left hand and the right one is held in *abhaya-mudrā*. The bull, the vehicle of the god, appears in the background. An image of Iṣāna dating back to the tenth century AD, comes from the Devī temple, Panchamahā, in which he is standing projecting the right hand in *varada-mudrā*. The left is placed in *kaṭihasta*. The bull, the vehicle of the god, appears in the background (Refer to Pls. 39-42).

9. Kṣetrapati

This god is invoked in the *R̥gveda* for the bestowing of cattle, horses and for the sweetening of the Sky, Earth and the vegetations—

क्षेत्रस्यपतेमधुमन्तभूमिं धेनुरिव पयो अस्मासु धुक्ष्व।
मधुरचुतं घृतमिव सुपूतमृतस्य नः पतयो मृळत्सु॥

—*R̥gveda*, IV.57.1

“O lord of the directions, as the cows yield milk similarly you supply us with sweet flowing water. As the sweet and flowing water bestows pleasure similarly all of you bestow pleasure on us since you always preserve the good deeds.”

Notes and References

1. *R̥gveda*, I.32.2; I.134.4; III.46.2; IV.46.3; IX.66.20; IX.113.8; X.14.1; X.16.9; I.110.1; *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 10.4.1.5; 11.1.6.14; *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*, 2.2.10.61; *Maitrāyaṇi Samhitā*, 2.5.6.
2. *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, 4.14.15; 7.70.10; *Mahābhārata*, Droṇa-parvan, 105.29.
3. *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, 1.48.16 ff.
4. Hopkins, E.W., *Epic Mythology*, p.35.
5. *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, 10.27.1-23.
6. *Ibid.*, 10.28.2-10.
7. *Ibid.*, 6.2.20.
8. *Ibid.*, 6.3.14.

9

The Sacred Trees

The Vedic literature mentions various types of trees including those which are considered to be sacred, some of which are listed below—

1. *Aśvattha* (*Ficus religiosa*)
It is indeed the greatest of the trees and is called *pīppal* as well. It plants its shoots in other trees especially *khadīra* and destroys them.
Rgveda, I.135.8, I.164.20, X.97.5; *Atharvaveda*, 3.6.1, 4.32.4, 7.11.1 and 5.4.3; *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 9.5.1.13; *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, 7.35.6; *Svetāśvatāra Upaniṣad*, 4.6.22, 5.54.52; *Māṇḍuka Upaniṣad*, 3.1.1; *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 4.1.4.1.
2. *Nyagrodha* (*Ficus bengalensis*)
Rgveda, I.24.7, *Atharvaveda*, 4.37.4, 5.5.5; *Taittirīya Saṁhitā*, 7.4.12.1; *Vājasneyī Saṁhitā*, 23.13; *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, 7.3.31; 7.35.5; *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 5.3.5.13; 7.2.9.3, 13.2.7.3.
3. *Plaska* (*Ficus infectoria*)
Atharvaveda, 5.5.5; *Taittirīya Saṁhitā*, 4.12.1; *Maitrāyaṇī Saṁhitā*, 3.10.2; *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, 7.32, 8.16; *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 3.8.3.12.
4. *Syamaka* (*Echinocloa calona*)
Atharvaveda, 19.50.4; *Taittirīya Saṁhitā*, 1.8.1.2, 2.3.2.6, 4.7.4.21; *Maitrāyaṇī Saṁhitā*, 2.11.4; *Vājasneyī Saṁhitā*, 18.18; *Kaṭhaka Saṁhitā*, 10.2.
5. *Tilvaka* (*Symplocos racemosus*)
Maitrāyaṇī Saṁhitā, 3.1.9; *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 13.8.1.16; *Sadavimsa Brāhmaṇa*, 3.8.
6. *Audumbarā* or *Vajavṛkṣa* (*Ficus glomerata*)
Atharvaveda, 19.31.1; *Taittirīya Saṁhitā*, 2.1, 1.6, 4.24; *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 3.2.1.33, 7.4.1.38; *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, 7.15; *Pañcaviṁśa Brāhmaṇa*, 16.6.4.
7. *Vikaṇṭaka* (*Flocourtia varmontaki*)
Atharvaveda, 9.10.3; *Taittirīya Saṁhitā*, 3.5.7.3; *Kaṭhaka Saṁhitā*, 19.10; *Maitrāyaṇī Saṁhitā*, 3.1.9; *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 1.2.4.10; 5.2.4.18.
8. *Soma*

The above list is only illustrative and not exhaustive. In fact a large number of trees like Aśoka, the flowers like the lotus and jasmine and a large number of medicinal plants are mentioned in the Vedic and post-Vedic texts, a detailed list of which has been provided in author's work on '*Botany in Ancient India*', which could be referred to for the purpose. However, a detailed account of *Aśvattha*, Aśoka and *Vaṭavṛkṣa* has been provided in the account that follows.

1. *Aśvattha* (*Ficus Religiosa* or the Fig Tree)

It is a large glabrous Indian tree of great antiquity and is also known as *pīpala*, the earliest mention of which is found in the *Ṛgveda*, wherein the term *Aśvattha* is also used for a prince as well, besides the tree.

(i) *The Etymology*

Once *Sūrya* was conceived as *Aśva*, the imagery of the cosmic tree as *Aśvattha* and of its dynamic energy as *Aśva* or *Mare* was easy. The cosmos is called *Aśvattha* because a horse is at its centre; or because it stands like a horse on three legs and is free on the fourth; or because it itself depends on the power or movement of the archetypal Horse that is *Sūrya* or the sun. Thus the conception of the sun or *Sūrya* and *Sūrya* or *Aśva* and *Aśvā* as the parents of *Yama* and *Yamī* on the one hand and of the two *Aśvins* on the other is consistent to the Vedic thought. *Yama* also is *Sūrya*, the regulating principle and *Yamī*, his sister is the female power that is in the sun. The two *Aśvins* also represent the principles of *Prāṇa* and *Apāna* or the two-fold energy as it is becoming manifest on the plane of the Matter in the conscious world.

(ii) *The Sanctity*

The sacred nature of the *Aśvattha* tree is traceable in the *Ṛgveda* itself, wherein it is recorded that its hard wood was used for kindling fire as the upper of the two pieces of wood, the lower one being of the *śamī* tree. According to the Brāhmaṇical belief, it was called as *Aśvattha* because it was stated to transport the gods and the *guru*. The *Atharvaveda* prescribes that the gods were often seated under the shade of this tree in the third heaven. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* describes the *Aśvattha* tree as showering *Soma* (the divine beverage). The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* describes it as an ancient tree with *Ūrdhva-mūla-avak-śākhā* or the tree whose roots are grown upward and whose branches grow downwards. The fig tree sends down its branches which strike the roots and form new stems, resulting in one tree growing into a complete forest. The Purāṇic texts speak quite highly about its sanctity wherein it is described as the only tree grown over the peak of *Vipura* hill. The *Vāmana Purāṇa* describes it as the holy tree. The *Skanda Purāṇa* testifies that in the roots of this holy fig tree *Viṣṇu* resides. In its trunk resides *Keśava*; in the branches resides *Nārāyaṇa*; in the leaves lives lord *Hari* and the fruits are the abode of *Acyuta* in conjunction with rest of the gods. It further goes on to pronounce that the fig tree is *Viṣṇu* himself appearing in his true form and the exalted souls worship the sacred roots of the tree. The dependence, according to the said text, on this tree wipes out thousands of the sins of the human beings. In the *Bhagavadgītā* (10-26) lord *Kṛṣṇa*, himself, declares quite emphatically,

that of all the trees in the universe, he has the form of the *Aśvattha* tree. In the same text *Aśvattha* is repeated twice. Gautama Buddha, and the Jaina Tīrthaṅkaras like Anantanātha and Śīlānātha are believed to have achieved the supreme knowledge under this tree.

(iii) *Projection in Art*

The presence of *Aśvattha* and its sanctity is testified in the Chalcolithic culture of Harappa, Mohenjodaro and other related sites. At Mohenjodaro, the tree is found over the pottery as well the seals, beads and amulets. As for example, in an amulet from Mohenjodaro, on the extreme right is an animal in composite form with its tail carried straight up in the air. On the left of this creature is a human being in a tree. At the extreme right, is a horned figure with arms adorned with bracelets, and stands between two trees whose leaves resemble those of the *pīpala*. To the left of the scene is a sacred goat decorated with garland which recalls another such tree in another Harappan seal in which the same animal appears. Beyond a kneeling horned deity, apparently a goddess, with a long pig tail, holds out both hands as if in supplication. The female deity standing in between the two *pīpala* trees in the Mohenjodaro seals has also been interpreted to be the tree goddess. The adoration of the tree is also found in the art of Sanchi, Bharhut, Mathura, Amarāvati and several other ancient sites in India.

(iv) *The Usages*

The *R̥gveda* testifies that the wood of *Aśvattha* tree was used for the making of the vessels and its berries which are said to be quite sweet are consumed by birds.

(v) *Medicinal Properties*

The works on Indian medicines speak highly about this tree. Its fruits, leaves and the bark possess medicinal properties. They are used in curing ailments, such as impurity of blood, excess of phlegm, wind and bile; burning sensation all over the body, vomiting, dropsy, want of appetite, poisoning, cough, remittent fever, hiccough, bruise in heart, disease of nose, dry spreading itches, worms, leprosy, a sore on the skin, besides burns etc.

2. *Vaṭa-vṛkṣa* (*Nyagrodha* or *Ficus bengalensis*)

Nyagrodha, means "growing downwards" and this tree has been identified with *Ficus bengalensis* or *Ficus indica*. It is remarkable for sending down from its branches fibres which take root and form new stems. It attains the height of about hundred feet or so and sends down roots from its branches, expanding its horizontal growth. The branches from which the roots descend after increase in thickness spread away from the central axis and form auxiliary stems. The tree is usually germinated by the seeds dropped by birds over trees or ground.

(i) *The Sanctity*

According to the Hindu spiritual thought, Brahmā is believed to have taken to the form of *Nyagrodha* and it is, therefore, considered to be sinful to destroy or injure the tree. The planting of the tree is considered to be of special merit. The leaves are employed as one of the *pañcapallavas* (five sacred leaves) and also for pouring the libation. The females are required to water the tree on special occasions.

The tree is of considerable antiquity and finds a veiled mention in the *R̥gveda*, while it finds frequent mention in the *Atharvaveda*. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (XII.7.1.9), states that the tree was made of Indra's bones, which also provides sweet drinks. The same text (XIII.2.7.3), further speaks about the origin of the name of the tree as under—

“The *Nyagrodha* with cups”—for when the gods were performing sacrifice, they tilted over the *soma* cups, and turned downwards; they took root whence the *Nyagrodha* (*Ficus indica*), when turned downwards (*nyak*), take root (*roha*).”

The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (XIII.8.1.16) prohibits the planting of the tree in the cremation ground. In the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (6.12.1), it is mentioned that Śvetaketu asked his father as to how the universe could emerge from Supreme Spirit (*Sat*) which has no form. To this the father asked the son to bring the fruit of *Nyagrodha* and break its seed and then proved about the essence of the universe with the example of the *Nyagrodha* fruit. This example goes on to prove that the *Nyagrodha* tree was considered to be useful in the highly spiritual ideology, as early as the Upaniṣadic period. The tree is also mentioned as the sacred one in the *Rāmāpūrvatāpiṇī Upaniṣad* as well as the *Nṛsiṃhopaniṣad*.

The *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* mentions the place called Pañcavaṭī in the Araṇya-kāṇḍa, located over the banks of the river Godāvarī and was considered to be quite sacred. The place was known as Pañcavaṭī, because of the presence of the cluster of five holy trees including *Nyagrodha*, the *Pipala*, mango, *Aśvattha*, *Neem* and *Aśoka*. In the *Mahābhārata*, the title of *Nyagrodha* has been given to Śiva, as well as Viṣṇu, in the prayers reciting their thousand names.

The tree also finds mention in the Purāṇic literature. In the *Vāmana Purāṇa* (60.24), the tree has been equated with Viṣṇu. In the *Varāha Purāṇa* (77.27), there is a mention of huge *Vaṭa-vṛkṣa* over the northern peak of Supārśva mountain, having a gigantic trunk and a circumference of three *yojanas*. The tree is further said to have been decorated with several garlands which stands for the adoration and the planting of the *Nyagrodha* tree, besides some others, from which one attains great merit and is saved from going to hell. The *Matsya Purāṇa* (118.3) describes the beauty of the forest with thick growth of trees including the *Nyagrodha*. The same text (217-78), also recommends that the king should keep in store (the wood) of *Nyagrodha* tree besides the other trees for the protection of the fort.

The Jaina texts testify that the *Tīrthaṅkaras* named R̥ṣabhanātha and Ajitanātha attained supreme knowledge under this tree.

(ii) Medicinal Properties

The milky juice of this tree is applied for pains and bruises and its application cures rheumatism and lumbago. It is considered as valuable application to the soles of the feet when cracked or inflamed and is also applied to the teeth and gums as a remedy for toothache or inflamed gums. An infusion of its bark is supposed to be a powerful tonic and is believed to have specific properties in the treatment of diabetes. The seeds are quite useful and serve also as a

tonic. The leaves are applied as a poultice for healing abscesses and after they have been turned yellow they are given with roasted rice in decoction as diaphratic. The root fibres are given in gonorrhoea.

3. *Aśoka (Saraca Indica)*

The word *Aśoka* means, the one who relieves others of all the grief. This is the tree considered to be quite sacred by the Hindus and is worshipped on the thirteenth day of *Caitra* month. Its flowers, on account of their beauty and the delicacy of their perfume, which is exhaled throughout the night during the months of April-May, are used in temple decorations. It is believed to be the symbol of love and is dedicated to *Kāma*, the god of love. It is also believed to have a charm for preserving the sanctity of a person. That is why, *Sitā*, the spouse of *Rāma*, after having been abducted by *Rāvaṇa*, escaped from the clutches of the demon, finding refuge in the *Aśoka* grove. In the *Mahābhārata*, there is the mention of *Aśoka* as one of the thousand names of *Viṣṇu*.

Besides the Hindus, the Buddhist and the Jainas also hold the tree to be quite sacred, because the *Tirthaṅkara* *Mallinātha* and *Pārśvanātha*, attained the supreme knowledge meditating under this tree. In Jainism, the *Aśoka* tree is included among the eight chief attendants (*Aṣṭamahāpratihāryas*) of the *Tirthaṅkaras* who accompany them. The tree, therefore, is frequently shown in the Jaina Art. The Buddhist too hold it sacred because, *Gautama Buddha* is believed to have been born under this tree. The Chinese traveller *Hieun Tsiang* had seen the *Aśoka* tree under which the Buddha was born.

Though the tree is rarely found mentioned in the early Vedic literature, but the *Purāṇas* happen to be quite familiar the same. In the *Vāmana Purāṇa* (12.51), lord *Viṣṇu* declares that he is represented as the *Aśoka* tree on earth, besides mentioning the existence of a forest of *Aśoka* tree near a temple (62.18). The flowers of *Aśoka* are prescribed for the adoration of the *Acyuta* form of *Viṣṇu*. The *Varāha Purāṇa* (11-33), prescribes that it is auspicious to plant *Aśoka* tree near the dwelling places. *Viṣṇu* too is said to be adored with the flowers of *Aśoka*. The *Matsya Purāṇa* (60-38), prescribes the flowers of *Aśoka* tree, besides others, for the worship of *Śiva*. The same text (62-24), also enjoins upon the devotees to offer flowers of *Aśoka* tree to the Goddess *Gaurī* in the month of *Caitra* (March-April). The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* (6.16), mentions about the blossoming of *Aśoka* tree. In the *Raghuvamśa* (IX.28) of *Kālidāsa*, its sprouting tender leaves are said to be used as ear-ornaments by the ladies. In the *Ṛtu-Samhāra* (VI.5.16), by the same poet, the tree also finds mention. The *Aśoka* tree is associated with the ladies as also the dancing girls. It is also considered to be the symbol of fertility and was especially worshipped by the barren ladies for getting offsprings. The tree was supposed to flower only when its roots were kicked by beautiful maidens. This aspect of the tree is amply projected in the monuments of *Bharhut*, *Sanchi* and other ancient sites.

The *Aśoka* tree has numerous medicinal properties. It is used by physicians in uterine diseases. The decoction of the bark in milk is usually prescribed for various ailments. The bark is used as an astringent in cases of several diseases.

4. Soma

Soma, according to the Vedic hymns, is the god who "represents and animates the juice of the Soma plant". He was the Indian Bacchus. Not only are all the hymns of the ninth book of the *Ṛgveda*, one hundred and fourteen in number, besides a few in other places, dedicated to his honour, but constant references occur to him in a large proportion of other hymns. In some of these hymns he is extolled as the Creator, or Father of the gods. Evidently at that time he was a most popular deity. Indra, as was stated before, was an enthusiastic worshipper of Soma.

From the Vedas the following account of Soma is derived. In some passages the plant is said to have been brought from a mountain and given to Indra; in others, king Soma is said to have dwelt amongst the Gaṇḍharvas, a race of demi-gods that form the choir in Indra's heaven. The gods, knowing the virtues of this king or plant—for the two terms seem to be indiscriminately applied—wished to obtain it. The gods said, "How can we spare you?" She replied, "Obtain the god; and I will then return to you, whenever you may want me."

Another account of this affair is, that whilst the gods were living on earth, Soma was in the sky. Wishing to possess it, they sent Gāyatrī (a name of Brahmā's wife or daughter) to fetch it. She went in the form of a bird, and was returning with it, when the Gaṇḍharvas seized it, and only gave it up when the goddess Vac went amongst them as narrated above.

When Soma was brought to the gods, there was a dispute as to who should have the first draught. It was decided that a race should be run; the winner to have the first taste. Vāyu first reached the goal, Indra being second. Indra tried hard to win, and when near to Vāyu proposed that they should reach the goal together, Vāyu taking two-thirds of the drink. Vāyu said, "Not so! I will be the winner alone". Then Indra said, "Let us come in together, and give me one-fourth of the draught divine!" Vāyu consented to this, and so the juice was shared between them.

Soma is said to have had thirty-three wives, the daughters of Prajāpati; of these Rohiṇī was the favourite. Being dissatisfied with the partiality shown to their sister, the other wives returned to their father. Soma asked that they might return to him; the father consented to restore them, provided Soma would promise to treat them all alike. Some promised to do this; but failing to keep his promise, was smitten with consumption for breaking his word.

In the verses descriptive of, or songs in praise of Soma, the actual juice, and the god supposed to dwell in it and to be manifested by it, are not at all distinct. All the gods drink of it; and Soma, the god in the juice, is said to clothe the naked and heal the sick. Many divine attributes are ascribed to him. He is "addressed as a god in the highest strains of adulation and veneration. All powers belong to him; all blessings are besought of him, as his to bestow." He is said to be divine, immortal, and also to confer immortality on gods and men. In a passage where the joys of paradise are more distinctly anticipated and more fervently implored than in most other parts of the *Ṛgveda*, Soma is addressed as the god from whom the gift of future felicity is expected. Thus it is there said, "Place me, O purified god, in that everlasting and imperishable world, where there is eternal light and glory. O Indu (Soma), flow for Indra! Make me immortal in the world where Vaivasvata lives, where is the universal sphere of the sky, where those great waters flow."

In later years the name Soma was, and still is, given to the moon. How and why this change took place is not known; but in the later of the Vedic hymns there is some evidence of the transition. In the following passage, Soma seems to be used in both senses—as god of the intoxicating juice, and as the moon ruling through the night. “By Soma the Ādityas are strong; by Soma the earth is great; and Soma is placed in the midst of the stars. When they crush the plant, he who drinks regards it as Soma. Of him whom the priests regard as Soma (the moon) no one drinks.” In another passage this prayer is found—“May the god Soma, he whom they call the Moon, free me.” Again, “Soma is the moon, the food of the gods.” “The sun has the nature of Agni, the moon of Soma.”

In the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* we read, “Soma was appointed monarch of the stars and plants, of Brāhmaṇa and of plants, of sacrifices and of penance.” In this *Purāṇa* we have quite a different account of the origin of Soma; but it must be borne in mind, that in this account Soma refers only to the moon. At the time the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* was written, intoxicants were strictly forbidden; hence Soma, as the god of the Soma juice, was no longer known and praised. According to *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, Soma was the son of Atri, the son of Brahmā. He performed the *Rājasūya* sacrifice, and from the glory thence acquired, and the immense dominion with which he had been invested, became so arrogant and licentious, that he carried off Tārā, the wife of Bṛhaspati, the preceptor of the gods. In vain Bṛhaspati sought to recover his bride; in vain Brahmā commanded, and the holy sages remonstrated. In consequence of this there was a great war; the gods with Indra on the one side trying to recover Tārā; Soma with the demons on the other. At length she appealed to Brahmā for protection, who thereupon commanded Soma to restore her. On her return, Bṛhaspati finding she was pregnant, refused to receive her until after the birth of the child. In obedience to his orders, the child was immediately born; who being wonderful in beauty and power, both Bṛhaspati and Soma claimed him as their son. Tārā being referred to, was too much as ashamed to speak. The child was so indignant at this, that he was about to curse her, saying, “Unless you declare who is my father, I will sentence you to such a fate as shall deter every female from hesitating to speak the truth.” On this Brahmā again interfered, pacifying the child, and saying to Tārā, “Tell me, my child is this the child of Bṛhaspati or Soma?” “Of Soma”, she said, blushing. As soon as she had spoken, the lord of the constellations, his countenance being bright, embraced his son and said, “Well done, my boy; verily thou art wise”; and hence his name was Budha.

Besides the above, the following trees find frequent mention in the Vedic literature—

1. Udumbara (*Ficus glomerata*)
2. Karkandu (*Ziziphus jujuba*)
3. Kākāmbira
4. Kārṣmarya (*Gmelina arboria*)
5. Kirmśuka (*Butea frondosa*)
6. Kṛmuka (Wood)

7. Kramuka (Wood)
8. Khadira (*Acacia catechu*)
9. Kharjura (*Phanix silvestris*)
10. Talāśa (*Facourtia tataphractia*)
11. Taraṣṭāgha
12. Dasavṛkṣa
13. Dāru (wood)
14. Niryāsa (exudation)
15. Pippalo (berry)
16. Pitudāru (Pine)
17. Pilu (*Careya arborea*)
18. Badora (Jujube)
19. Bilva (*Cardia myxa*)
20. Rohatika (*Andersonia rohitaka*)
21. Sirṁsapa (*Dalbergia sisu*)

10 The Birds

Garuḍa

The ancient Indian culture and the mythologies, the world over, contain reference to numerous mythological beings with fabulous or the composite forms which were closely associated with their deities to serve them in the accomplishment of their magico-religious beliefs. The Ṛgvedic literature as well as the antiquarian remains of the country have preserved such specimens relating to the subject. Such forms have not only served the gods or other deities but are also believed to have provided healing touch, to the people besides rescuing them at the time of the great danger or distress. The ancient Indian art, thought and literature was infested with mythological beings. In the Indian religious horizon, several mythological beings emerged through the contemporary literature, art and the religious society, leaving indelible impressions in support thereof. While some of them disappeared from the Indian religious thought as rapidly as they had mushroomed, few others took time in disappearing, while some of them continued to survive even to the present times, facing all the adversities of the time and the human behaviour. Out of the surviving fabulous beings, Garuḍa enjoys a prominent position.

Tracing the genesis of Garuḍa, in Indian literature, it may be stated that he was known in the Vedic literature as Suparṇa, Tārakṣa and Garutmān. But it can hardly be claimed with authenticity whether these epithets at that early stage stood for Garuḍa with fabulous form as conceived subsequently. In the Vedic and the post-Vedic literature, the epithets of Garutmān and Suparṇa were used. Moreover, there is no trace of his being the carrier of Viṣṇu at that early stage and he continued to enjoy that exalted position during the period of *Atharvaveda* (IV.6.3) as references like दिव्यः स सुपर्णो गुरुत्मान् suggest. The position of a celestial bird was enjoyed by the bird during the post-Vedic times. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* and the *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa* contain many such references. The *Āraṇyakas* too continued to bestow the same position on him.

It may be pointed out here that there is some controversy about the identification of Garutmān or Suparṇa with Garuḍa of the later times. In this connection, there is a school of thought which believes that the later Garuḍa developed a personality of his own, independent of Vedic Garutmān Garuḍa. In this connection J.N. Banerjea observes, "In many passages of the great epic, Garuḍa is formally identified with the Vedic Garutmān and is further described as the brother of Aruṇa, the forerunner of Sūrya in the developed mythology of the epic and the Purāṇic period." Hopkins, on the other hand, believes that in one of the hymns of the *Ṛgveda* (Book tenth), a mystical song has been termed as the bird of the sky, a metaphor which soon gives another figure in the pantheon in the form of Garutmān, the sun bird, of whose exploits containing strange tales are told in the epic. The same author further goes on to testify on the basis of the epic evidence, that the gods sing a hymn to Garuḍa, the epic form of Garutmān, the heavenly bird, who steals the *soma*. In fact the Vedic divinities and later additions in the shape of Kubera, the god of wealth, Kāma, the god of love, the heavenly bird Garuḍa, the serpent

Śeṣa, together with countless genii, spirits, ghosts and manes, the heavenly bodies and stars etc., were revered, though, they enjoyed somewhat lesser importance than those of the gods of Śaivite or Vaiṣṇavite sects.

It may also be brought out here that the *Mahābhārata* testifies that it was Garuḍa who brought back the nectar vase from the heaven, earning him the title of *Amṛtahaṛaṇa*, but this title could also be attributed to Indra, who in turn carried back the same nectar pot from the Nagar which ultimately deprived them of the chance of consuming it. The *R̥gveda* (IV.26.4) further testifies that the nectar was stolen by Vāmadeva or Indra in the form of Śyena for Manu. In another passage Śyena is identified with Suparṇā. The same Syena has further been described as churning Soma from the mountain and Syena has also been equated with Suparṇa.

A hymn in the *R̥gveda*, speaks of Garutmān as an embodiment of arrogance. A human being is compared to the arrogance of the bird Suparṇa, greed like an eagle, passion like an owlet, intoxication of a dog, stupidity of an owl and the irritation of a wolf—

उलूकयातु शुशुलूकयातु जहिश्वायातुमत कोकयातम्।
सुपर्णयातुमत गृध्रयातु दृषदेव प्रभृण रक्ष इन्द्र॥

—*R̥gveda*, X.5.6

In the *R̥gveda*, Garuḍa has been known by the epithet of Suparṇa. When he gets the name of Suparṇa, he also becomes heir to other attributes and identifications of Suparṇa. Hence, he is to be identified with Gāyatrī and is also called yajña-taruḥ in the *Suparṇadhyāna*. In this connection notice has also to be taken of a few passages of the *Atharvaveda*, which speak of Suparṇā Garutmat in the context of the antidotes to the poison.

But the animosity between the serpents and Suparṇa is hardly visible at this stage. The word poison here is a general term and there is no indication of its being the poison from the serpents leading one to surmise as to the antagonism between Suparṇa and the serpents and again it is a question as to why in the general trend of the *Brāhmaṇas* there is no indication of animosity between the serpents and the Garutmat or Suparṇa. In yet another passage in the same text, the word Suparṇa has been mentioned by Sāyaṇa as Vainatiya.

The Vedas were followed by the *Brāhmaṇas*, *Āraṇyakas* and the *Upaniṣads*. The conflict between the Garuḍa and the Nāgas is found for the first time in the *Brāhmaṇas*. The *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* testifies that from the wings of Garuḍa are produced the peacocks and also ichneumon who happened to be the deadly enemy of serpents. Now the peacock devours the snakes which are also eaten by Garuḍa and also killed by ichneumon. These creatures which are being eaten by the one or the others, form a sort of a group, which is suggested by their birth in this text thus—

तस्य अनु विसृज्य कृशानु सोमपालः सव्यस्य पदोनखमच्छिनत्।
तस्य यदनीकमासीत् स सर्पो विदश्च भवत् सहजः स्वजः॥

—*Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, III.26.3

Besides the above, the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* also mentions about the wager between Kadrū or the Suparṇa (otherwise called Vinatā); besides it is the gods who caused Soma to be brought back to them. It would thus be evident that the adversity of Garuḍa with the Nāgas had developed during the period of the *Brāhmaṇas*.

Of the five main *Āraṇyakas*, the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* serves as the continuation of the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* and is connected with the *Kṛṣṇa-Yajurveda*. It contains a passage which is devoted to Garuḍa, thus—

तत्पुरुषाय विद्यमहे सुवर्णं पक्षाय धीमहि तन्नो गरुडो प्रचोदयात्॥

—X.1.6

Garuḍa continues to appear in the Upaniṣads, as for example, in the *Kṛṣṇopaniṣad*, lord Kṛṣṇa is described as the protector of the all righteousness. The *cakras* are described to be the phenomenal world as Brahman. The chief vital air is the *Dharma*. The conch and disc are respectively the *Siddhis* and the *bindu*, the direct protecting *turiya* is the *Sahasrāra* over the crest of all the beings and Garuḍa has been equated as a banyan tree. In the *Samhitās* too, Garuḍa has not been left behind and in the *Maitrāyaṇī Samhitā*, Suparṇa has been identified as *Vāk* (speech), which goes well with the metres being called Suparṇa. The *Taittirīya Samhitā*, on the other hand, repeats the wager between Kadrū and Suparṇa in which Kadrū desires Suparṇa to procure *amṛta* as the price of the freedom for the latter. The feat was accomplished by Garuḍa, the son of Vinatā, though the serpents could not consume the nectar so brought by Garuḍa.

However, the association of Garuḍa with Viṣṇu added to his popularity manyfold. His personality was developed in the epics. Though in the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmiki, his performance was limited to his freeing Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa from the serpent bondage, but in the said text, the fact of his being the vehicle of Viṣṇu has been quite well established. In the *Aranya-kāṇḍa* of the said epic, Jaṭāyu informs Rāma about his ancestors, mentioning Garuḍa to be among his forefathers. But the most celebrated performance of Garuḍa in the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, indeed has been the freeing of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa from the serpent fetters. Garuḍa was summoned by Rāma, at the advice of Vibhīṣaṇa. Garuḍa reached the battlefiled and on his arrival all the serpents who had kept both the Ayodhyā princes in bondage, at once fled away. Thereafter Garuḍa went to both the brothers and eulogised them. He also healed all the wounds of the Ayodhyā princes with the very touch of their bodies. Garuḍa was then embraced by them—

ततः सुपर्णः काकुस्थौ स्पृष्ट्वा प्रत्यभिनन्द्य च।

विमर्शं च पाणिभ्यां मुखे चन्द्रं समं प्रभे॥

—*Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, Yuddha-kāṇḍa, 5.37

But the event of Garuḍa becoming the vehicle of Viṣṇu has been described for the first time in the epic of the *Mahābhārata*. In the *Ādi-parvan* of the epic, the birth of Garuḍa is described, his achievements and his freeing his mother from the bondage of Kadrū. The *Udyoga-parvan* of the *Mahābhārata*, however, contains a story according to which, Viṣṇu established his superiority over Garuḍa.

The Purāṇas were more vocal about the personality and the performane of Garuḍa. According to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the *Pārijāta*-tree was brought by Kṛṣṇa, mounted over Garuḍa and planted in the palaces of the lord at Dvārakā. The *Brahma Purāṇa* describes both Aruṇa and Garuḍa as the two sons of Vinatā, besides several other episodes. The *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, *Matsya Purāṇa*, *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*, *Varāha Purāṇa* and several other Purāṇic texts mention about Garuḍa in one way or the other.

Though Garuḍa appeared over the Indian religious horizon at quite an early stage, but his distinct iconographical features were developed at a later stage. He is reported to have appeared in the form of a parrot on the eastern gateways of Sanchi, besides the Haliodorus pillar at Besnagar in Vidisha, but in the period that followed, his physical features remained more or less undefined, though in the Kuṣāṇa and early Gupta art, he enjoyed the composite form, sometimes with a human body having wings or a bird's head placed over the human body. Thus he was also represented in hybrid form combining in him the features of a bird and a human. He indeed achieved considerable popularity after his achieving the position of the carrier of Viṣṇu. However, with the development of Vaiṣṇavism in the country, Garuḍa, as the mount of lord Viṣṇu, came to be defined in such a way that he became a god unto himself or an incarnation of Viṣṇu. Thereafter, it was quite natural that Garuḍa became a fascinating motif in Indian art, going as far back as a few centuries before the Christian era and then travelling through the Kuṣāṇa and Gupta period to the medieval times, though traces of some of the iconographical features of the celestial bird could be found in the *R̥gvedic* texts. He is known by another name of Tārka which was quite popular in the epics and the Purāṇas and was spelt out twice in the *R̥gveda* (I.89.6; X.178.1). Though the inner side of the middle architrave of the eastern gateway of Sanchi Stupa no. 2, presents Garuḍa as a huge parrot like bird, the Hallenistic art of Gandhara presents him as a huge eagle-headed form with all the ornaments. Besides Garuḍa's carrying of serpents into the sky, held either in its beak or his talons, present quite an early stage of the evolution of the iconography of the celestial bird.

Though during the Śuṅga, Kuṣāṇa and the Andhra or Mathura period, Garuḍa had already surfaced, still the detailed iconographical features remained undefined. Even the Gupta period remained the intermediate stage in the evolution of the iconography of Garuḍa motif. However, the medieval period had been more vocal on defining the iconographical features of Garuḍa. The *Viṣṇudharmottara*, the *Śrītattvanidhi*, the *Aparājita-prachā*, *Śilparatna* and *Agni Purāṇa* provide considerable details relating to the iconography of Garuḍa.

- (i) ताक्ष्यो मरकतप्रख्यः कौशिकाकारनासिकः।
 चतुर्भुजस्तु कर्तव्यो वृत्तनेत्रमुखस्तथा॥
 गृध्रोर्जानुचरणः पक्षद्वयविभूषितः।
 प्रभासंस्थानसौवर्ण किलापेन विराजितः॥
 छत्रं तु पूर्णकुम्भं च कस्यो तस्य कारयेत्।
 करद्वयं तु कर्तव्यं तथा विरचिताञ्जलि॥
 यदास्य भगवान्पृष्ठे छत्र कुम्भ धरौ करौ।

न कर्तव्यौ तु कर्तव्यौ देव पादधरौ शुभौ॥

किंचिल्लम्बोदरः कार्यस्सर्वाभरण भूषितः॥ —Viṣṇudharmottara

(The image of Garuḍa should have the colour of emerald and the beak and the legs should be made to resemble those of a kite. The eyes should be roundish and the image should have four arms and two powerful wings of yellow colour and bright lustre. Umbrella should be held in one hand and the nectar vase in the other; the other two arms are to be held in *añjali* pose. He should have a flabby belly.)

Such is evidently the description of the image of Garuḍa when he is sculptured independently as apart from Viṣṇu. When the image is associated with Viṣṇu, the two hands carrying respectively the embrosia pot and the umbrella should both be engaged in supporting the feet of Viṣṇu, riding astride the shoulders of Garuḍa.

(ii) उपेन्द्रस्याग्रतः पक्षी गुडाकेशः कृताञ्जलिः।

सव्य जानु गतो भूमौ मूध्ना च फणिमण्डितः॥

स्थूल जङ्घो नरग्रीवस्तुङ्गनासौ नराङ्गकः।

द्विबाहु पक्षयुक्तरच कर्तव्यो विनता सुतः॥

—Śrītattvanidhi

(Garuḍa should be kneeling on the left knee and his crown should be adorned with snakes. His legs and knees should be made stout. Garuḍa should possess the face and body of a human being, but his nose should be raised and pointed prominently. He should have only two hands held in *añjali* posture.)

(iii) आजानू तप्तहेमप्रभमय हिमप्रख्यमानाभि साक्षा-

दाकण्ठात्कुङ्कुमाभ भ्रमरकुलसमश्यामलंमूर्ध्नि शान्तम्।

व्याप्त ब्रह्माण्डगर्भ द्विभुज भयदं पिङ्गनेत्रोग्रतारं

वाक्ष्यं नीलाग्रनासद्युतिविविधमहापक्षलक्ष्यं नमामि॥

पालादेवो गरुत्मानमृतघटगदाशङ्ख चक्रासि नागा-

न्विभ्राणः कृष्ण पादौ निजकर कमलैरष्टभिस्स्वर्णवर्णः।

पापघ्नै पक्षपातैरखिलविषहै राश्रितार्तिचवृत्तः

श्रीमान्वापन्नगारिस्सकलविषभयारलजालोज्ज्वलाङ्गः॥

—Śilparatna

(The image of Garuḍa should have the golden yellow colour from the feet to legs, should be snowwhite from the knees to the navel, scarlet from navel to neck and jet black from neck to the head. The eyes should be yellow and the beak blue; there must be a terrific look in the eyes of Garuḍa and he should have only two hands, one of which has to be in *abhaya* pose. Alternatively, Garuḍa should have eight hands in six of which he should respectively, hold the pot of embrosia, the club, the conch, the *cakra*, the sword and the snake. Nothing is said about the remaining two hands, which could probably in the *añjali* posture.)

11

Epilogue

The foregoing account has highlighted the presence of a number of Vedic gods, who enjoyed quite prominent positions during the Vedic Age and some of them like Viṣṇu, Rudra, Prajāpati and others were patronised by the society in the post-Vedic times with certain modifications, further developing their personalities making them more popular, adorable and acceptable to the society at large while doing so. Several stories were developed and carried to the masses, exhibiting their prowess and the skill to remove the sufferings of the people, further granting them the desired boons. This is the case of such prominent gods who were adopted by the post-Vedic society and continued to be held in high esteem and their adoration continued to attract widespread following and numerous religious edifices were erected in due course of time throughout the country for their adoration in one form or the other. Simultaneously, several literary works were composed in their honour and reaching the epic and the Purāṇic period, they indeed, the deities of the common man, were adored in almost every household.

But there had been a set of Vedic gods who were quite powerful during the Vedic period, but were relegated to the background during the subsequent period. The names of Indra, Varuṇa, Vāyu, Agni, Bṛhaspati, Yama and others come under this category. Indra and Varuṇa were so powerful gods of the Vedic period but during the subsequent period they lost their original grace and interestingly some objectionable episodes were associated with them, which could be the possible reason for falling from the grace. A few of such examples are produced hereunder—

- (i) **Indra**—The episode of Ahalyā, in which Indra destroyed the chastity of the chaste lady of Gautama sage, was possibly responsible for the fall of Indra from the grace or the high pedestal over which he was placed during the Vedic period. Though he continued to be present in the Indian religious thought even to the modern times, but he had to be content with the position of a Dikpāla. The Purāṇas further testify that the adoration of Indra was stopped forcibly by lord Kṛṣṇa and the episode of lifting of Govardhana by Kṛṣṇa, stands witness to the same.
- (ii) **Brahmā**—He was known as Prajāpati, popularly during the Vedic period, but had to lose the grace apparently for two reasons. Firstly, because of a curse pronounced on him by his own son Nārada, who cursed him to lose adoration from the people. Secondly, he had cast an evil eye over his own daughter, as a result of which he had to lose one of his five heads which was severed by Lord Śiva at the instance of the gods. Śiva too, as a consequence, earned the sin of *Brahmahatyā*. Though Śiva was ultimately relieved of the sin of *Brahmahatyā* by taking a bath in Vārāṇasī, but Brahmā could not be relieved of the disgrace. He, therefore, retired from the Indian religious scene and his temples were found only at a selected few places like Puṣkara and a few others.
- (iii) **Varuṇa**—He also had been a powerful Vedic god but was pushed into oblivion in the epic and Purāṇic times, when he had to be content with the position of a Dvārapāla alone.

This is the position with several other Vedic gods but it would not be possible to discuss all the details about them for obvious reasons. But still, there had been some Vedic deities, who were though mentioned during the Vedic literature but lost their relevance almost completely after the Vedic period.

Though the higher society of the Vedic period adored the Vedic gods, the common man, however, adored the lesser important deities like Yakṣas, who were conceived to be quite powerful and possessed strong physiques. In the *Atharvaveda*, Parama-Yakṣa has been adored, who is said to control the entire material world. He has been described as "quite great". In the *Mahābhārata* too, there is a mention of a Yakṣa festival known as *Brahma-maha*. Yakṣas were believed to have been adored by every village as village-god, who was believed to protect the entire village. His images were placed under a tree outside the village and the people made their offerings to the Yakṣa. Interestingly enough, colossal images of Yakṣas dating back to the pre-Christian era have been found from several sites in the country. The Yakṣas and Yakṣīs have been frequently mentioned in the Buddhist and the Jaina literature.

Besides the benevolent forces represented by the gods, the evil forces were represented by the demons, Rākṣasas, or Asuras. The Vedic Aditi is believed to be the mother of the gods, while Diti happens to be the mother of Daityas or Asuras who were so called because they were denied to consume the *surā* or the wine that emerged from the churning of the ocean.

The gods or the goddesses alone were not adored by the Vedic people, but the trees and rivers were also held by the Vedic people in high esteem, besides the birds like Garuḍa and others. The names of the rivers like the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā are frequently mentioned. A small episode in this connection can be referred to highlighting the sense of adoration for the rivers. According to *Ṛgveda* (III.83.3), once Viśvāmitra had to cross the rivers and he, therefore, begged the passage from Vipāśā and Śatadru for crossing them. But both the rivers found themselves helpless because of the command of Indra, the god of gods, who had desired them to irrigate the surrounding areas (*Ibid.*, III.33.4). Viśvāmitra then again expressed to the rivers to reduce their flow in order to enable him to cross them. (*Ibid.*, III.33.5). At this the rivers obliged.

Thus during the Vedic period, it was not only customary to offer the prayers to the gods and goddesses but also to the rivers or even trees. Another important point worth consideration here is about the demons and the *asuras*. These were the sons of Kaśyapa from Diti and were cousins of the gods. But with the passage of time both the gods and *asuras* became enmity to each other and were mostly engaged in overpowering the other. Sometimes the demons or the *asuras* were successful, while sometimes the gods got the upper hand driving the demons or *asuras* to *Pātāla*. The Indian literature has numerous instances of this type. Evidently at every stage of the past religious history of the country, these evil as well as divine forces were at work, always engaged at defeating each other. This is not the case of the religious scene, but even in everyday life, one has to come across the godly and evil forces at every step and life indeed is nothing but a continued struggle with these forces. Sometimes, he is successful and sometimes he is not.

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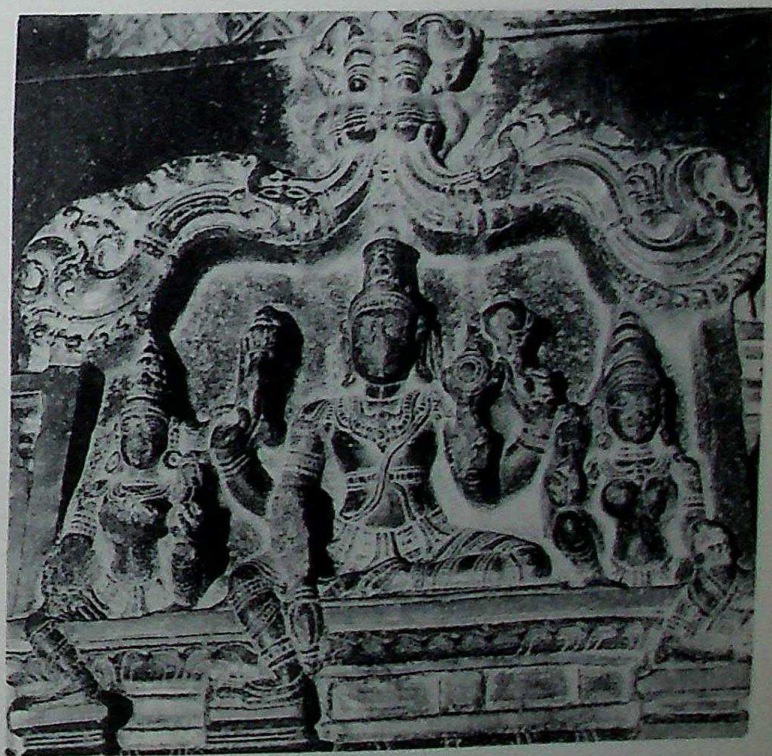
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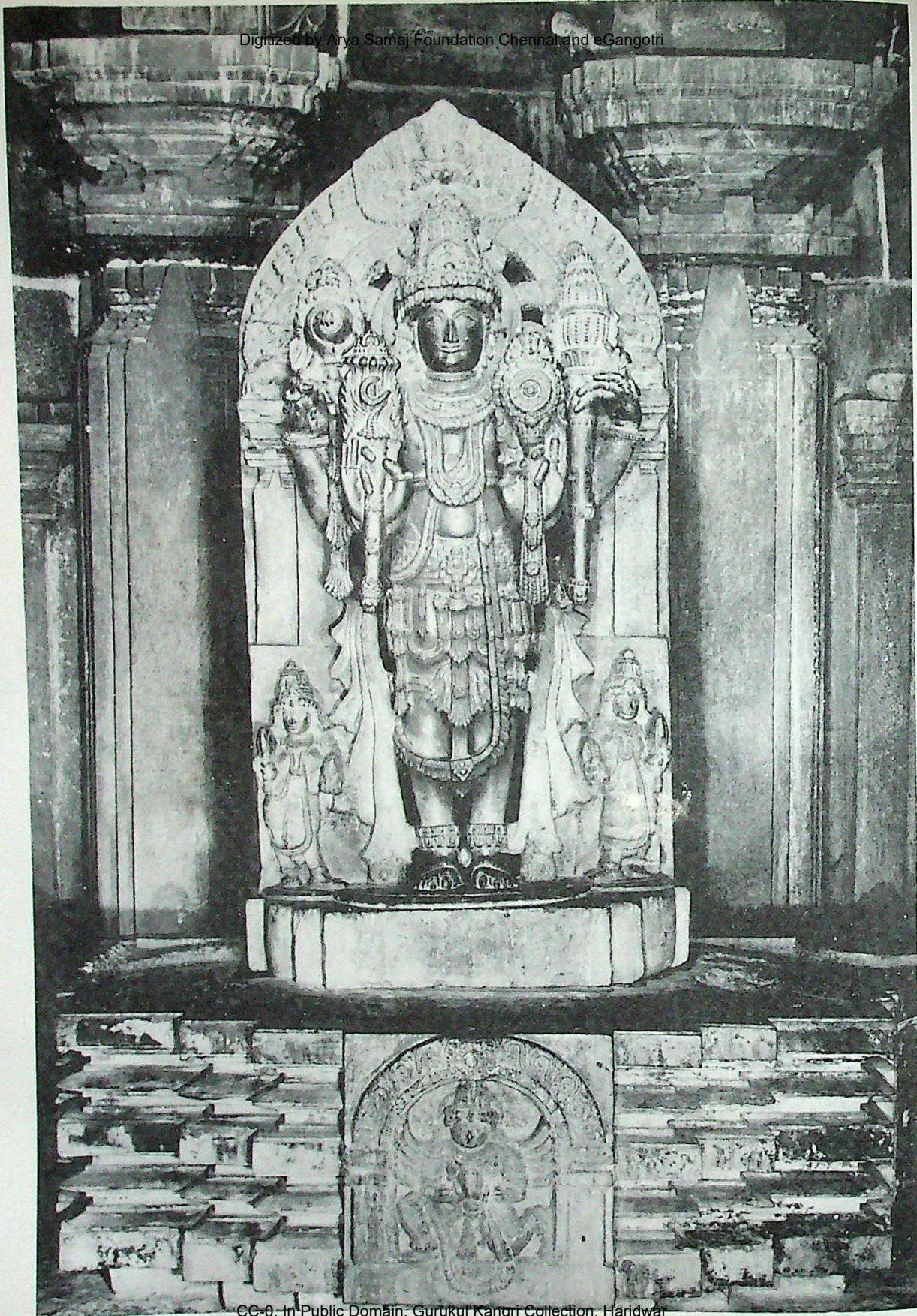




Pl. 1. Standing Viṣṇu, terracotta plaque, 5th century A.D.



Pl. 2. Seated Viṣṇu, flanked by Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī, Hazara Rāma Temple, Hampi, 12th century A.D.



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Pl. 3. Standing Viṣṇu, Somanathpur,
13th century A.D.



Pl. 4. Terracotta plaque showing Narasimha, 5th century A.D.



Pl. 5. Stone sculpture showing beautifully decorated *jaiās* of Śiva, Jammu, 8th century A.D.



Pl. 6. Stone sculpture showing beautifully decorated *jaiās* of Śiva, Jammu (side view), 8th century A.D.



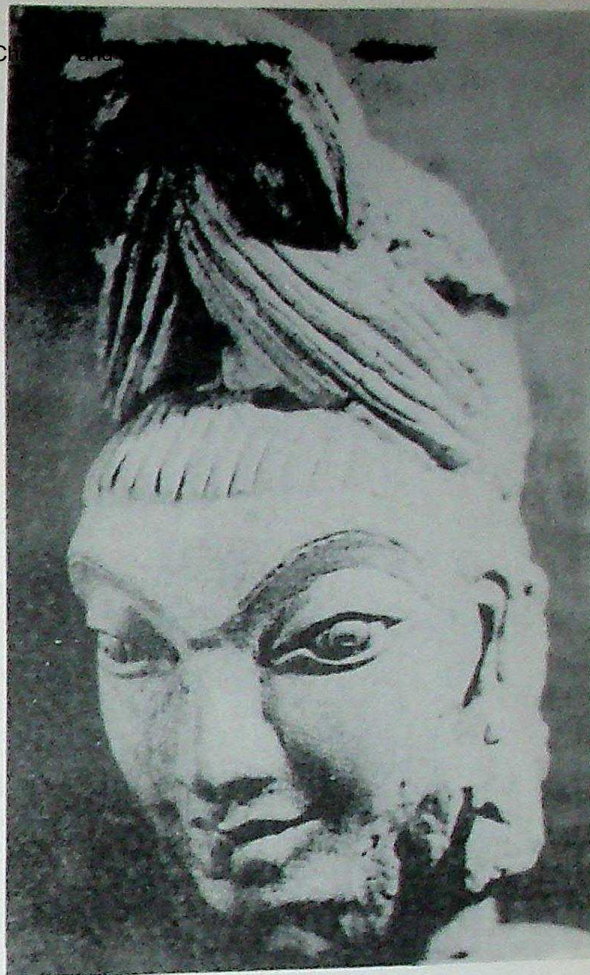
Pl. 7. Śiva seated in *dhyānamudrā* with a crown of matted locks of hair; Pārvatī is seated to the left; Hanuman, 8th century A.D.



Pl. 8. Bust of Śiva, showing beautifully arranged locks of hair, Gupta period terracotta.



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Pl. 13. Bust of Brahmā, stone, Mathura Museum, 5th century A.D.



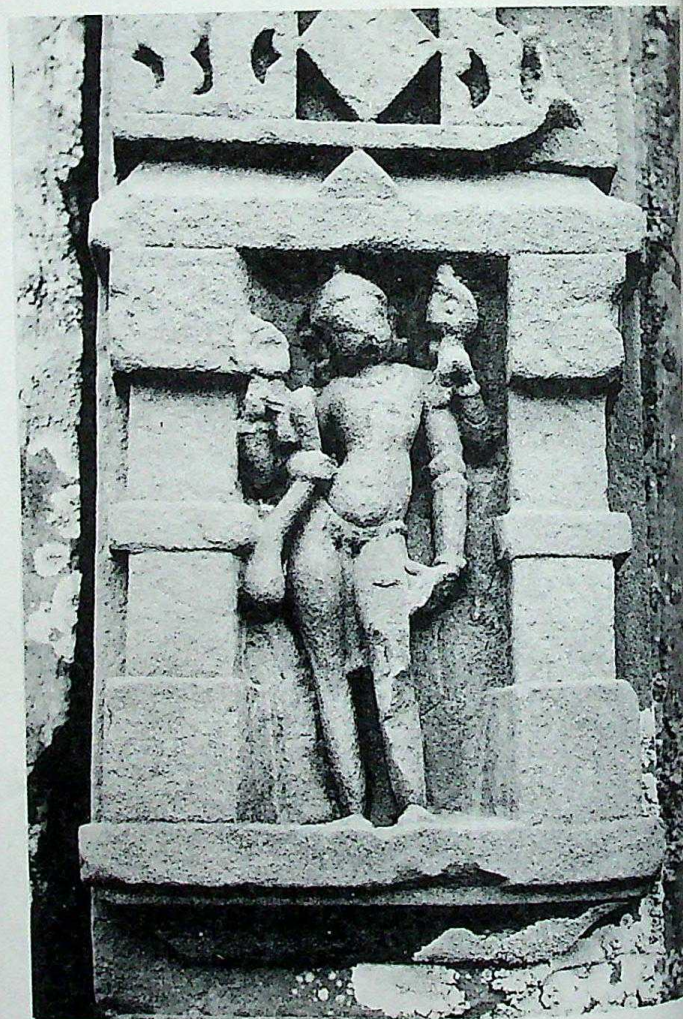
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Pl. 15. Indra standing(?) Indore-Guna,
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Pl. 16. Agni standing, stone sculpture,
Devī temple, Pañcamahal, 10th
century A.D.



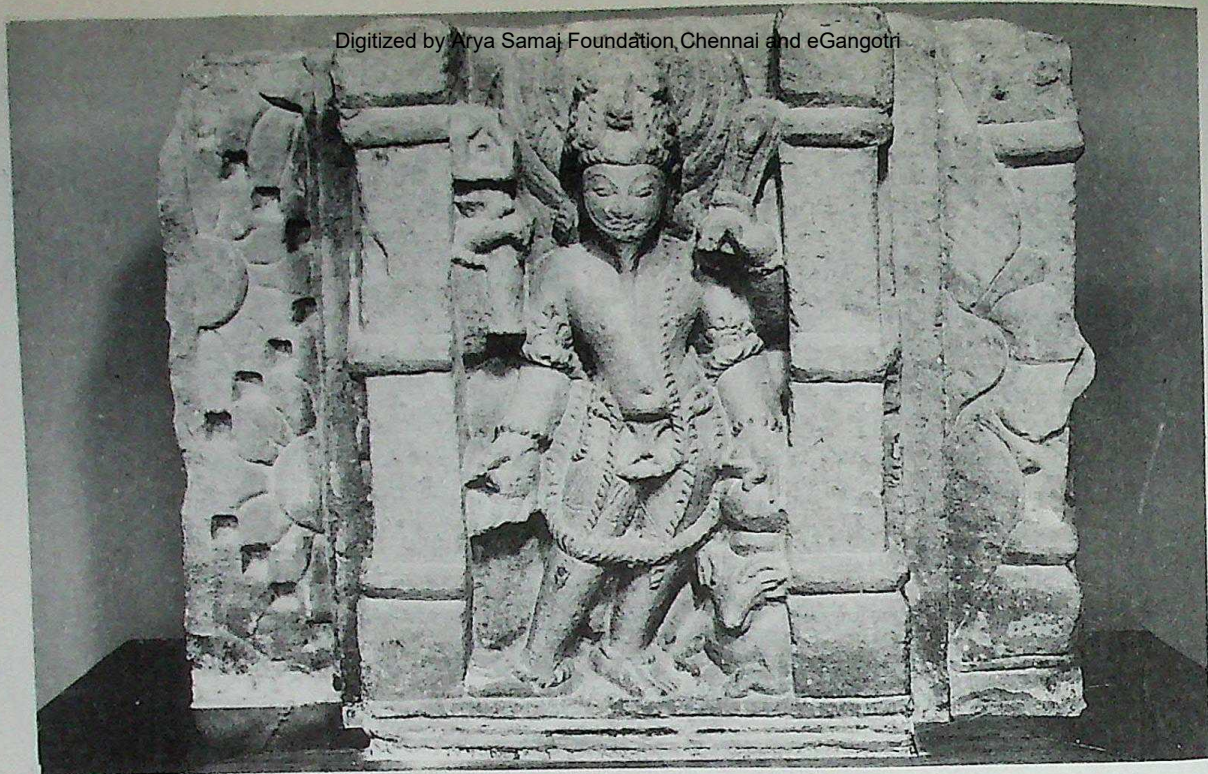
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temple, Vetās.



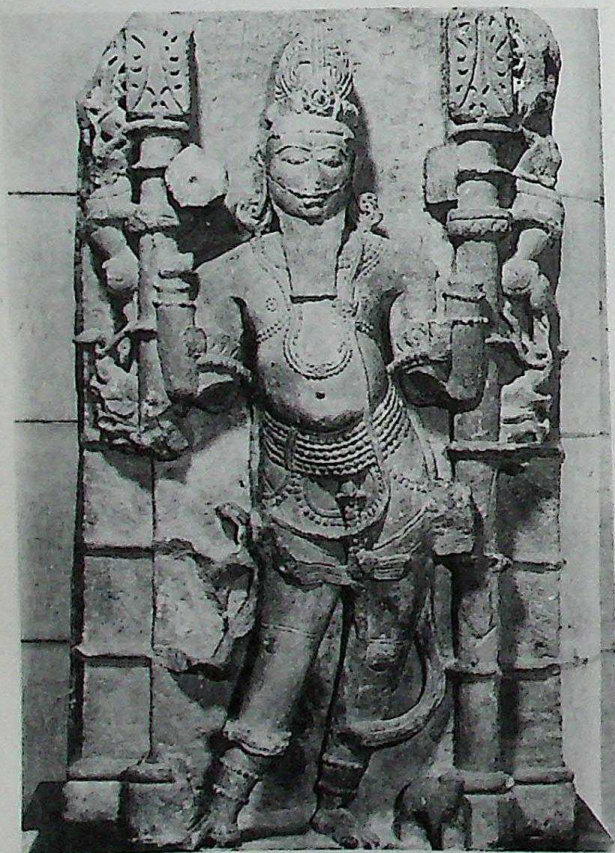
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Pl. 18. Agni seated, stone, Rudrapur, Gorakhpur, 11th century A.D.
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Pl. 20. Agni standing, Allahabad Museum, 11th century A.D.



Pl. 21. Agni standing, Gujarat, National Museum, 13th century A.D.



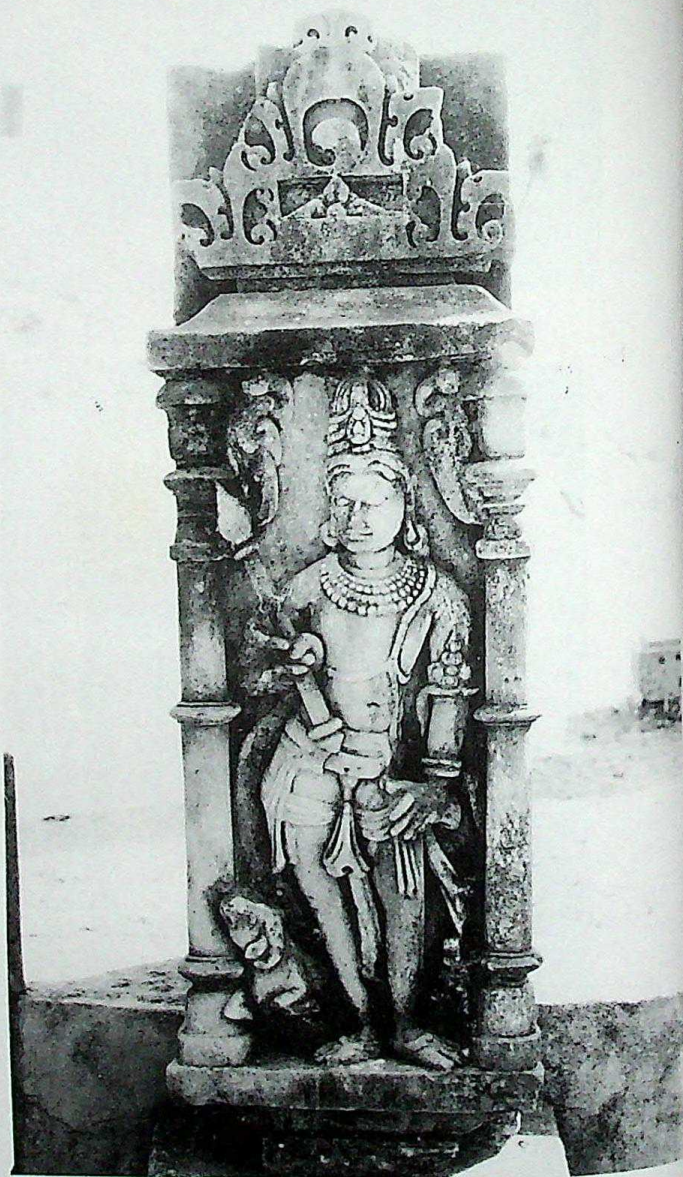
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Pl. 23. Yama standing, Indore-Guna, 8th
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Pl. 27. Varuṇa, stone, Pattadakhal, 8th
century A.D.



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Varaha standing, stone, Indore.
Guna, 8th century A.D.



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Pañcamahal, 10th century A.D.



Pl. 30. Varuṇa standing, stone, Patna Museum, 12th century A.D.



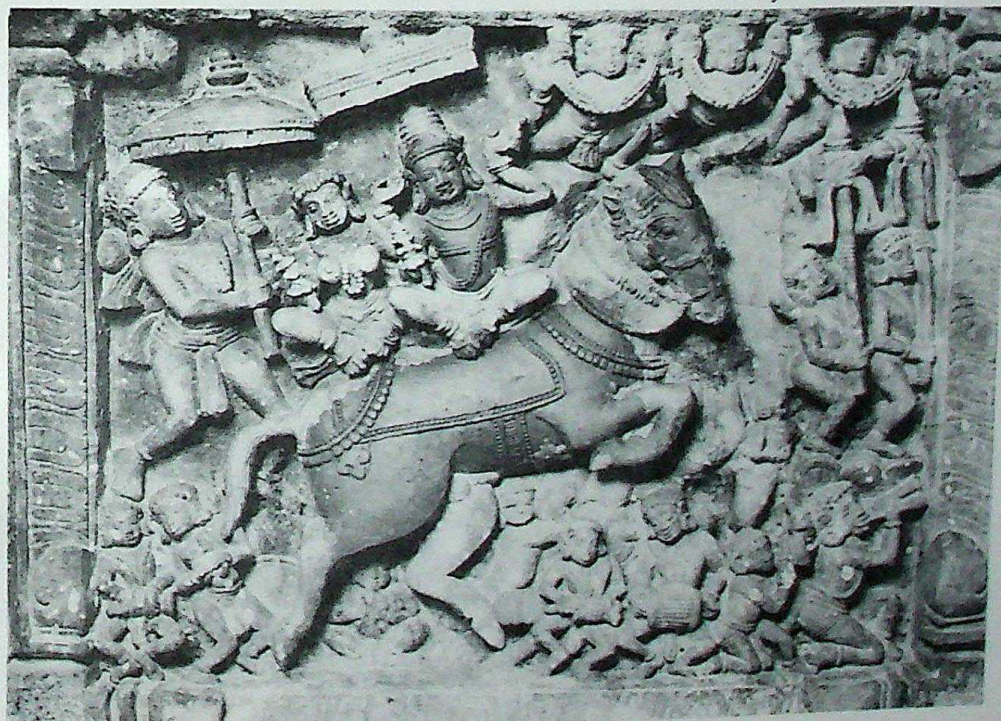
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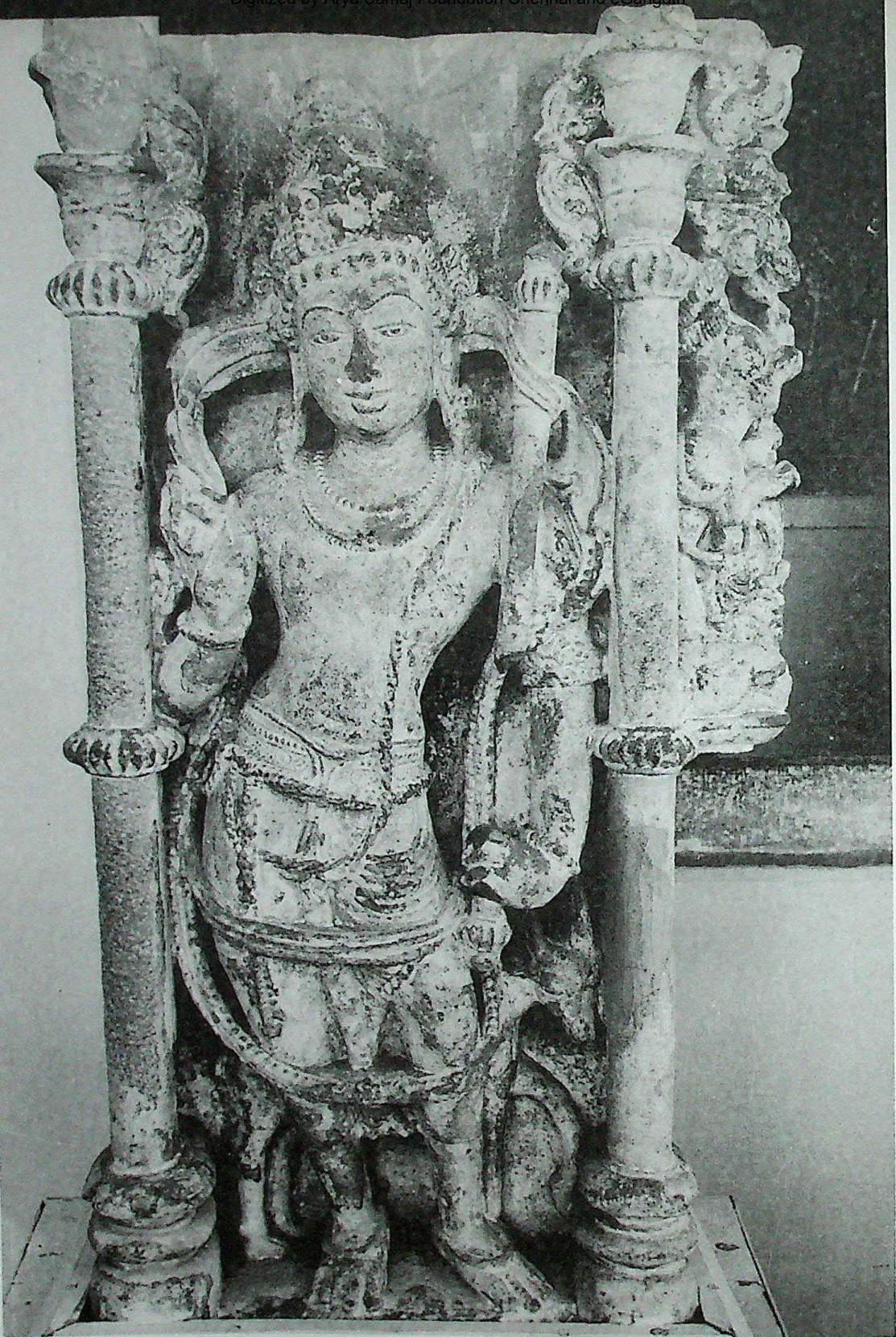
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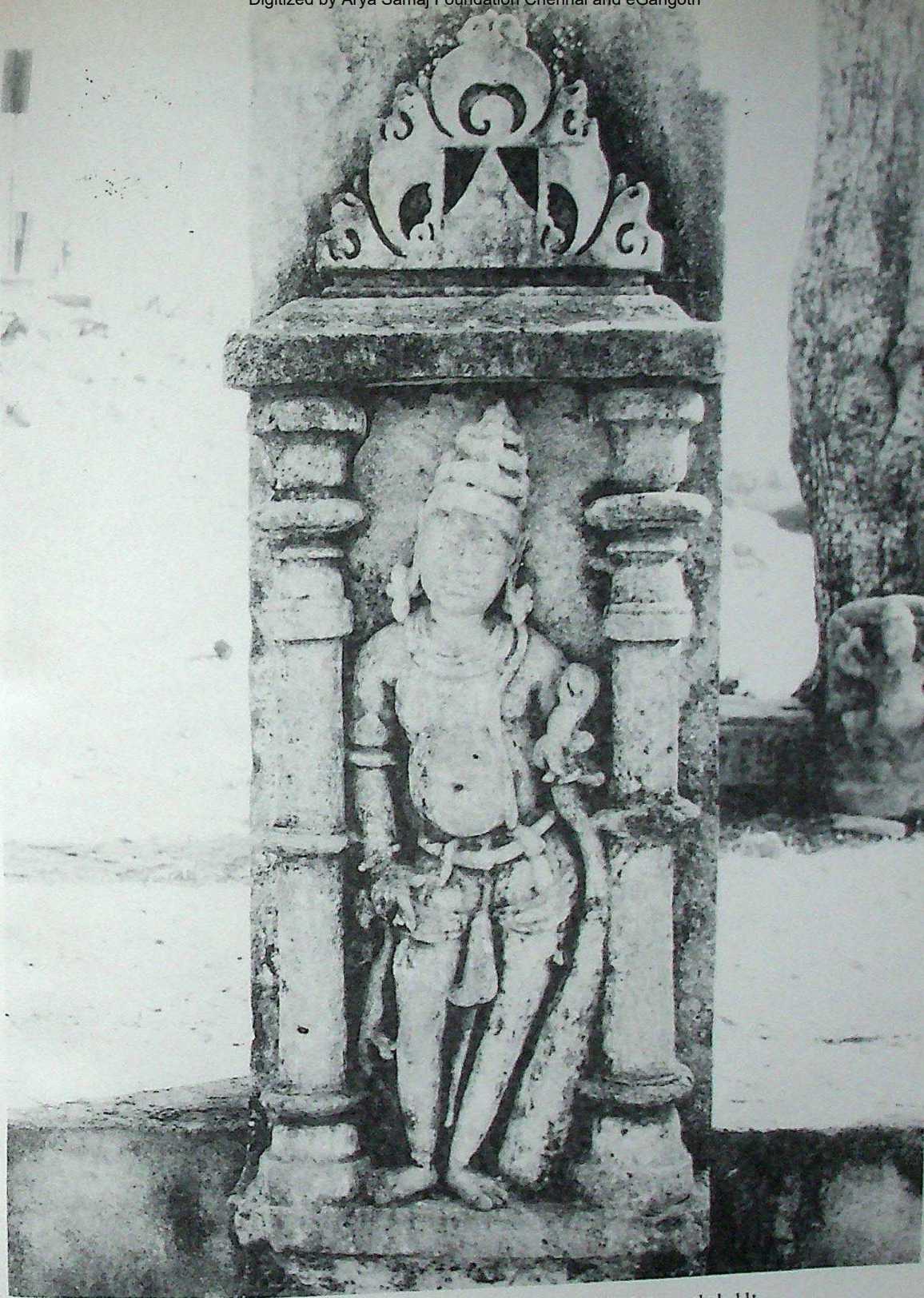
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Pl. 95. Vayu standing, stone, Jhalrapatan,
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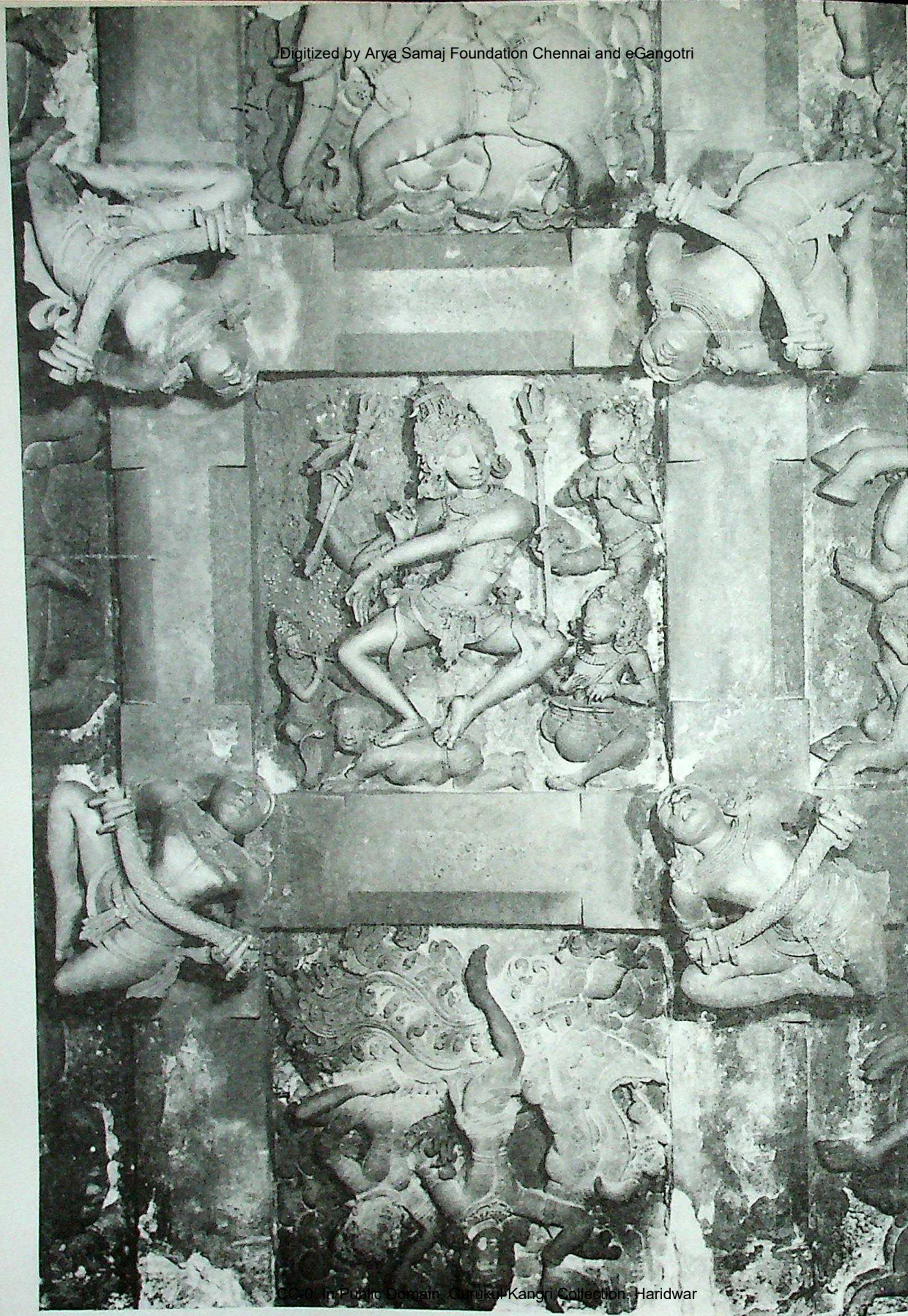
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Pl. 37. Kubera seated, stone, Pratap Museum, Udainpur, 11th cen.
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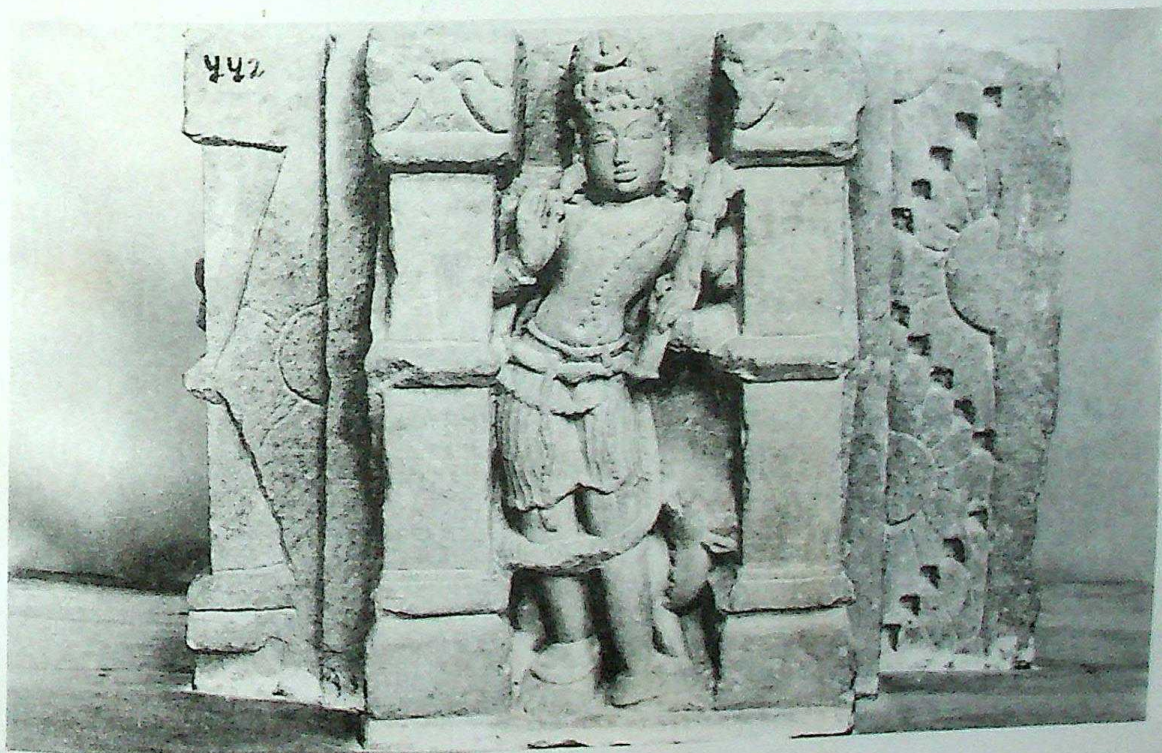


Pl. 38. Kubera standing, stone, Devi temple, Pañcamahal, 11t
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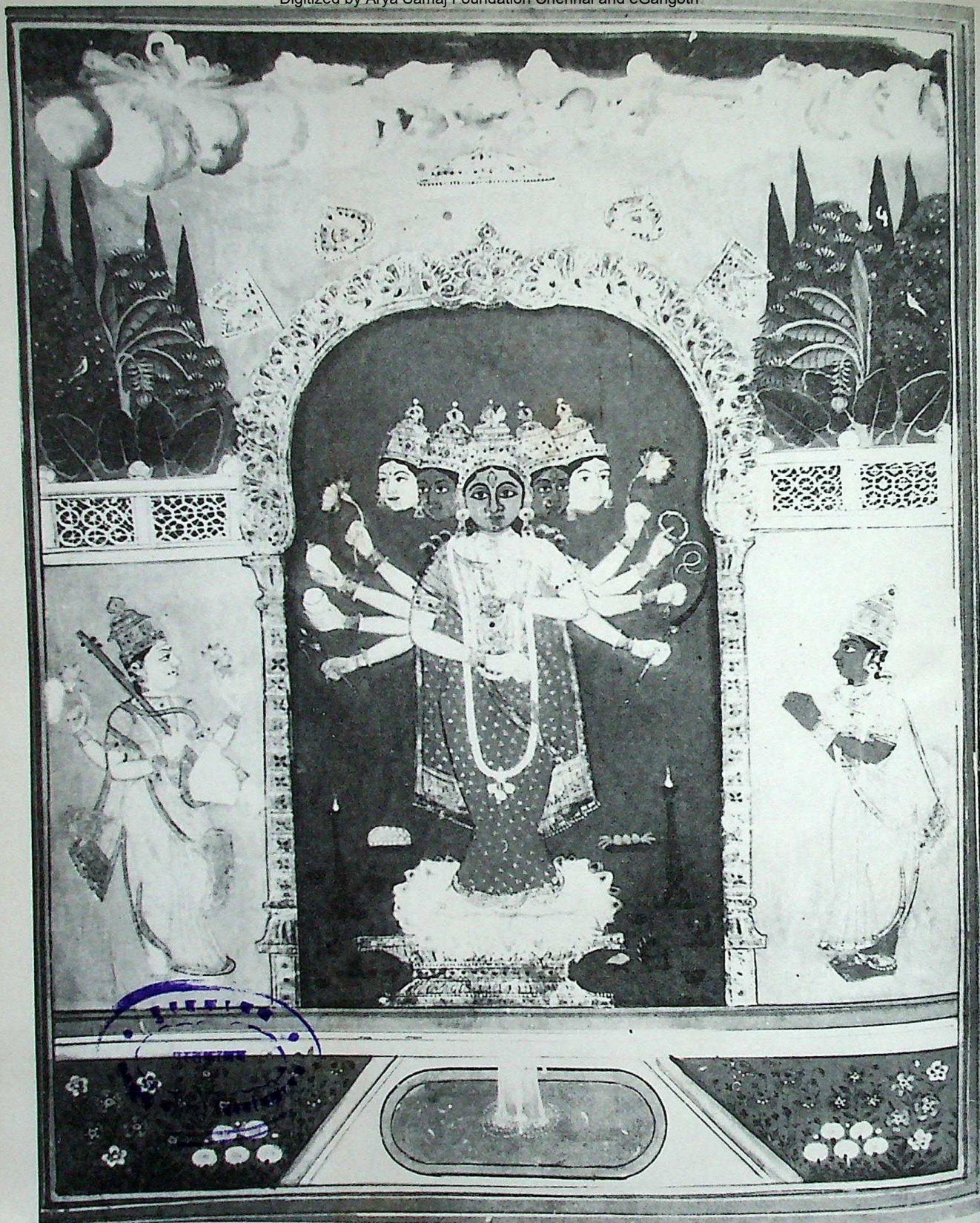




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Pl. 46. Hindu deity, Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar
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The author, a graduate of the Punjab University, served in the curatorial capacity in the Central Asian Antiquities Museum, New Delhi, the Archaeological Museum, Nalanda, and Archaeological Section of the Indian Museum, Calcutta for a number of years. He has to his credit the scientific documentation of over fifty thousand antiquities, in these museums, representing the rich cultural heritage of the country and comprising of sculptures, bronzes, terracottas, beads, seals and sealing, ancient Indian numismatics, wood work, miniatures and paintings, textiles and Pearce collection of gems, ranging from the earliest times to the late medieval period. He was awarded, in 1987, a fellowship, for his monograph on the Temples of Himachal Pradesh, by the Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi. The glimpses of the authors works are provided below -

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